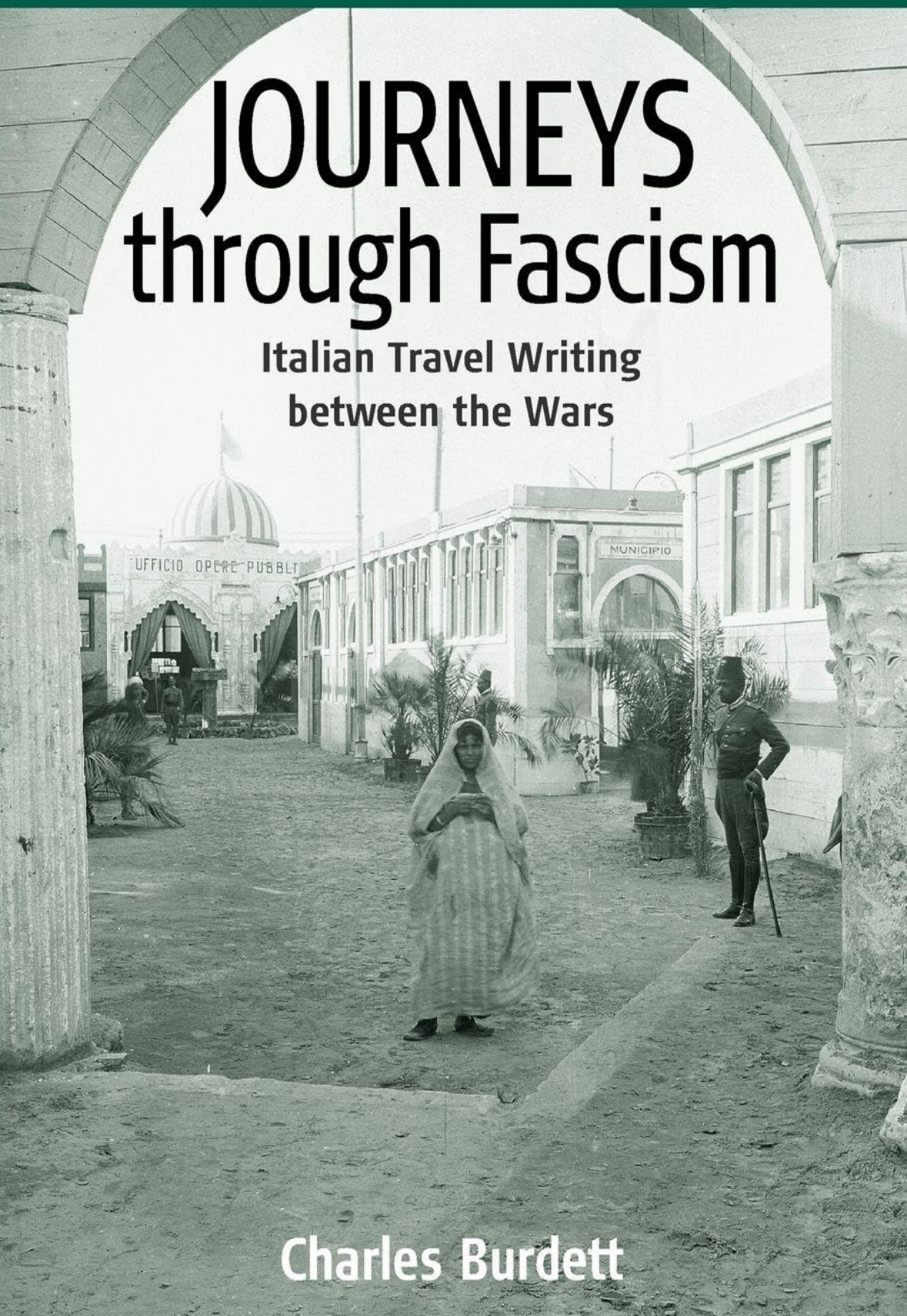


REMAPPING CULTURAL HISTORY – VOLUME 7

JOURNEYS through Fascism

Italian Travel Writing
between the Wars



Charles Burdett



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Journeys through Fascism

Remapping Cultural History

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The theoretical paradigms dominant in much of cultural history published in English tend to be derived from northern European or North American models. This series will propose alternative mappings by focusing partly or wholly on those parts of the world that speak, or have spoken, French, Italian, Spanish or Portuguese. Both monographs and collective volumes will be published. Preference will be given to volumes that cross national boundaries, that explore areas of culture that have previously received little attention, or that make a significant contribution to rethinking the ways in which cultural history is theorised and narrated.

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Journeys through Fascism

*Italian Travel Writing
between the Wars*

Charles Burdett



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a Claudia

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Introduction

Writing on Fascist Culture

The twenty years of Fascist rule in Italy were characterized by a series of violent and spectacular events. The 1920s witnessed the destruction of the democratic institutions of liberal Italy, the murder of Giacomo Matteotti (1924), the effective silencing of the opposition and the establishment of a dictatorship. In the mid-1920s, the regime orchestrated the collective struggle to increase the production of grain ('the Battle for Wheat') and to retain the value of the Italian currency ('the Battle for the Lira'). In the early 1930s Italy developed its interest in territorial expansion with new impetus and in October 1935 it launched its assault on the Ethiopia of Haile Selassie; the successful conclusion of the invasion was celebrated by Mussolini's night-time declaration of empire to throngs of ecstatic supporters. In the Spanish Civil War Italy was quick to send armed support for the Nationalists, though engagement in the conflict soon exposed costly deficiencies in the military's preparation and strategy. Rapprochement with Nazi Germany in the late 1930s led directly to the introduction of anti-Semitic legislation. The annexation of Albania and the ruinous invasion of Greece were to follow as Italy's opportunistic entry into the Second World War quickly began to prove disastrous. During the years of its existence, the regime attempted to control every aspect of the life of Italians: it dictated what was taught in schools and it extracted allegiance from those it employed; it placed definite limitations on movement and expression, while establishing powerful networks of surveillance. The state sought to control the media and guided representation both of itself and of happenings in the wider world.

The success of Fascism in extending the boundaries of the modern state was achieved not only through coercion but through its ability to encourage mass consensus by propagating a vision of society that large sections of the Italian public were prepared to appropriate and adapt. Much scholarship, over recent decades, has focused on the power of elements within the

evolving ideology of Fascism to promote a sense of mass belonging and purpose.¹ Roger Griffin has examined in detail the emergence and the strength of the conception of the nation that lay at the heart of Mussolini's philosophy, with its eclectic origins in the thought of pre-war avant-garde groupings, in radical syndicalism and in the rightist nationalism of figures like D'Annunzio and Corradini (Griffin 1993: 1–26, 56–85).² In the model that Griffin's work sets out, Fascism is seen as a political ideology based on the profoundly rooted belief that it alone offered the national community the promise of a radically reordered society. While proclaiming a vision of the future at odds with the alleged decadence of liberal democracy, it depended upon an idea of the nation as a higher spiritual entity. If the suffering and sacrifice of the First World War had enacted the beginning of the nation's rebirth, its 'palingenesis', then Fascism, a movement whose core was initially made up of veterans and interventionists, would ensure the nation's continual renewal through one struggle after another.³ Its ultra-nationalism was not elitist but popular since all strata of society were insistently led to believe that they were active participants in the colossal process of regeneration. For Griffin the power of Fascist ideology resided in its ability to use the myth of a resurgent nation as an agent of revolutionary transformation. Initially within the movement itself, and subsequently within the propaganda sponsored by the state, the notion of an ideal society served important mobilizing and anticipatory functions. By presenting his political doctrine as the path towards military might, empire, order and prosperity, Mussolini could allow his followers to enjoy the dream of a magnificent future, while enlisting their active support in the creation of that future. The myth of a new beginning for the Italian civilization could be enjoyed as a fantastic projection, while working as an impulse towards radical change.

Emilio Gentile's influential theorization of Fascism (1993) as a kind of secular religion has some affinities with Griffin's model though methodologically it relies more on cultural anthropology. The premise of *Il culto del littorio* is that modernity, understood as the increasing rationalization of every aspect of society dating roughly from the French Revolution, is characterized by the transference of the sacred from the domain of the established religions to that of politics.⁴ In other words, as faith in an afterlife and in the observance of the law of God declines, then political movements concerned with material reality begin to occupy the ground that has been left vacant. Gentile interprets Fascism as a hybrid belief system whose cult of the nation drew both on the post-Risorgimento liturgy of the state and on symbols and concepts appropriated from Christian worship.⁵ The principal squares of most towns and cities in Italy were, in the years between the wars, transformed into vehicles for the

celebration of both the nation and the regime through the succession of parades, memorial services and occasional apparitions of the Duce.⁶ But it was Piazza Venezia, at the very heart of Rome, that became the most sacred space within the developing cult of the Lictor and the fulcrum of the ceremonial calendar of the regime. From the balcony of his official residence, Mussolini proclaimed the successful completion of one stage after another in the acquisition of imperial power. Beneath liberal Italy's most grandiose monument, the imposing Altar to the Nation, the Fascist state celebrated its rise to power, its military prowess and its heroic dead.⁷ The carefully orchestrated rallies in Rome and elsewhere served, as Gentile documents, not only as the representation of the mystic communion between the nation and its inhabitants with the profession of collective affirmation of patriotic faith that such a communion implies. They were also the repeated occasion when the mass of the Italian population could be exposed to the core myths of Fascist ideology with their emphasis on a narrative of mourning and renewal, the importance of individual sacrifice and the unquestioned legitimacy of the state. In their fusion of the world as lived and the world as imagined, the rituals organized by the regime, from the celebration of the martyrs of Fascism to the anniversary of the March on Rome, were intended to confirm a belief in the fundamental value of collective action and belief. They articulated a vision of humanity and history that rendered the sentiments that they inspired the only reasonable way of reacting physically and psychologically to the problems of the contemporary world.⁸

If we accept Gentile's interpretation of Fascism as civic religion, then the movement's dependence on and manipulation of aesthetics becomes especially significant.⁹ The architects of the Fascist state were prescient in their understanding of the power of the image in mass society. The recurring celebrations and rituals, as they staged patriotic feeling and allegiance, exploited the aesthetic sensibilities of the crowds they attracted for political ends. The state's visual representation of its power was intended to promote sensations of awe, wonder and ultimately submission. The symbolic language of Fascism as it was articulated through images, rituals and speeches is the subject of Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi's book, *Fascist Spectacle* (1997). Working from Walter Benjamin's definition of Fascism as the introduction of aesthetics into political life (9–10) in order to facilitate the production of ritual values, she explores the different levels at which the regime's coherent system of myths aimed to appeal to Italians. She looks in particular at the cult of the leader and the rewriting of the history of ancient Rome. What emerges from her analysis of the personality cult surrounding Mussolini is its multi-faceted nature. Over the twenty years of his rule, Mussolini was presented as military leader, romantic hero, superhuman

sportsman and tireless administrator. Not only was he portrayed as the man responsible for the restoration of Italy's fortunes, he was also identified with the nation itself. The recurrence of his image in the iconography of the regime nourished the fable of his omnipresence, while his triumphant appearances in the ceremonies of the state reinforced his status as the God-like creator, moulding the masses through his speeches and through his orchestration of a cult. Accompanying the presentation of Mussolini as the new Caesar was the increasing indulgence in a highly selective celebration of Roman glory.¹⁰ The celebration took little account of the complexity of the different stages of Rome's evolution and it ignored periods of decline or decadence, preferring to concentrate on the hagiographic representation of figures like Augustus or Scipio. By the 1930s not only did ancient Rome figure as the predominant trope in the official symbolic discourse of Fascism, but the very purpose of the regime seemed to be the recovery of the glories of the ancient past. The successful conclusion of one domestic or foreign campaign after another was celebrated as a stage towards the overarching objective of regaining Italy's rightful heritage as the guiding nation of the world.

The concluding section of *Fascist Spectacle* examines the presentation of the regenerative power of war. Falasca-Zamponi examines the complex of belligerent metaphors in Mussolini's speeches and the presentation of one policy after another in terms of military conquest.¹¹ Above all, she reveals how the Italian assault on Ethiopia in 1935 was presented as a melodramatic clash of good and evil. The cult of the leader and of ancient Rome was furthered also by the extensive exhibition culture of the 1930s, which a number of recent studies have examined (Schnapp 1992; 1996b; Stone 1993; Russo 1999). One gigantic exhibition was staged after another: they celebrated the anniversaries of the March on Rome, of the Fascist Revolution, of the beginning of the Battle for Wheat and of the various projects of land reclamation. Had the Second World War not intervened, then Naples would have been the site of a vast exhibition of the Italian empire (or Italy beyond the seas) and Rome would have hosted the universal exhibition of 1942. To visit any one of the many exhibitions in which the regime celebrated its achievements, its vision of history, its preference for the monumental over the human, was to experience a range of carefully staged feelings. It was to move from the profane to the sacred, to experience a sense of individuality giving way to one of collective pride and belonging (Schnapp 1992). The purpose of encouraging the mass reception of spectacular images was intended to replace the normal procedures of democracy and legitimate Fascism's hold on the destiny of the nation. Through its mystifying rhetoric and symbolic practices, the regime sought to substitute scrutiny of its policies with an aesthetically mediated belief in

their inevitability, to make, in the words of Gentile (2002), a rational use of the irrational.¹² The narrative of the state's resurgence predominated over criticism of its operation just as the beauty of armed struggle was intended to replace any perception of the objective reality of violence.

The vast cultural apparatus, which supported the mythic projection of policy, is the object of Ruth Ben-Ghiat's study, *La cultura fascista* (2000).¹³ She locates the appeal of Fascism both to the community of intellectuals and to other leading sections of society in its claim to offer a path towards modernity that endangered neither existing social hierarchies nor deep-laid national traditions. As a movement that had originated in liberal Italy and that was prepared to accommodate the Catholic Church, Fascism could claim to protect Italian society from the perils of Soviet Communism on the one hand and consumer capitalism on the other.¹⁴ It was also a political ideology that intended to promote the spiritual well-being of its adherents rather than simply aiming to improve their economic circumstances. Ben-Ghiat sees the primary role of organized culture as disseminating the vision of modernity and national regeneration – understood as reclamation, radical reordering and appropriation – that lay at the base of the Fascist project of social engineering. In the late 1930s, journalists, artists and writers were employed to facilitate the state's totalitarian ambitions. Intended to ensure consensus, cultural initiatives promoted the integration of the masses into the spiritual revolution of Fascism, and broadcast a code of behaviour that encompassed the work patterns, leisure activities and daily lives of Italians, encouraging the belief that every aspect of life could be lived in accordance with a creed that dictated obedience. The ultimate purpose of the cult of the nation – as the work of Gentile, Ben-Ghiat and others emphasizes – was nothing short of a reformulation of individual consciousness, a drive to make the Fascist self.¹⁵ The ritual practices of the regime, coupled with the institutional apparatus of modernity, aimed to change Italians down to their most intimate thoughts of life and death. Ideally the individual conflated his or her destiny with that of the state, becoming not only a believer but also an agent of the nation's imperial, autarchic or demographic campaigns. In his examination of the exhibition culture of the 1930s (1992), Schnapp argues that the symbolic representation of the movement from disharmony to order was intended to mirror the journey of the new kind of citizen from the chaos of individuality to the joy of the collective.

As Guido Bonsaver's analysis of the censorship of literature under Fascism (2003) demonstrates, the regime relied upon a complex series of practices to regulate the culture industry: in the 1930s Mussolini's Press Office evolved into a ministry of its own, while publishers and authors sought new ways of dealing with the ever tighter strictures that emanated from government.¹⁶ The projection of the dynamism of the Fascist nation,

achieved in part by the active promotion of certain cultural initiatives and by the suppression of the opposition press, was something that no Italian could have ignored.¹⁷ Discussion of the attempt to enlist the active sympathy and support of broad strata of the population and of the means that were available to accomplish this aim – from the institutions of the state to the relatively new media of cinema and radio – leads to the question of how co-ordinated and effective state initiatives were in practice and how far the attempted colonization of consciousness was successful. David Forgacs (2004) draws a distinction between the redirection of the various sub-cultures – including militarism, syndicalism and ruralism – that coalesced within Fascism and the state's relationship with established forms of cultural production that raised more intractable problems of influence. He argues that, despite the possibility or the actuality of recourse to oppressive kinds of intervention, the involvement of all means of cultural expression within the totalitarian project was dependent on the scope of the agencies of the state and, to an extent, on the willingness or otherwise of those involved in the culture industry to co-operate. He suggests that it is through the record of processes of negotiation, compromise and interaction that one can piece together the complexity of attitudes that lay behind an appearance of formal acquiescence.¹⁸ Ben-Ghiat draws attention (2000) to the variety of factors – ranging from class, gender, geography, family tradition and religious belief – that influenced the reception of the hegemonic political discourse of the time. The question of the degree to which Italians were prepared to accept, resist or appropriate the teaching of the state is, of course, central to works of oral history on the period and to studies that seek to explore the impact of Fascism by examining specific communities or sections of the population.¹⁹ What is clear both from work that concentrates on the elaboration of Fascist doctrine and from studies that focus on the question of its reception is its essential syncretism, the facility with which it incorporated seemingly contradictory elements within the broadest confines of its ideology as well as its ability to mean different things over time to different people.

Travel and Travel Writing

The purpose of this study is, broadly speaking, to contribute to the body of work that examines Italian culture under Fascism. It does so by looking at a specific area of literary/journalistic production that can be defined, with some qualification, as travel writing. In its many and varied forms, travel writing poses questions of theoretical and cultural importance and it has aroused a high level of interest across disciplines that stretch from

literary studies to history, geography and sociology.²⁰ For John Kerrigan (1998) the range of critical interest in the genre, from a sociological concern with the mechanics of tourism to a geographical interest in culture, is in itself indicative of the collapsing of the boundaries between academic subjects. As many commentators have argued, travel writing attempts to convince its reader that what it describes is real and it makes a virtue of its apparent truthfulness and reliability (Buford 1984: 7; Davidson 2001), but representations of landscapes or cities are constitutive rather than reflexive (Barnes and Duncan 1992: 5–6). Though writing about travel may refute a connection with fiction and insist on the referential nature of its judgements, the genre is a hybrid literary form whose claim on the factual should be treated with scepticism. In the words of Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan, it is ‘a practised art of dissimulation’ (1998: xi), one that draws on techniques borrowed from the adventure story, the epic or even the novel. At the same time as it disguises its status as representation, it tends to accentuate the imaginative or the strange, and it relies all the time on techniques of self-description.²¹ Travel allows any person the opportunity of discovering aspects of themselves: it provokes memory, it can induce fear, it acts as a stimulus for the imagination. In many of its modern manifestations, from tourism to the adventure holiday, it is related to pleasure. Travelling can prove to be a process, as Trinh Minh-ha suggests, where the self is altered by what may be a disturbing ‘yet potentially empowering practice of difference’ (1994: 23). In writing about the experience of the journey, the travel writer presents the reader with an interpretation of his or her inner motivation, susceptibility or resistance to diversity, and disposition to follow or to stray from the beaten track.

The peculiar pressures, the dangers and the emotional conflicts that travel can provoke may encourage introspection but they also lead to an awareness of individual and collective constructions of identity. Zygmunt Bauman has argued that ‘one thinks of identity whenever one is not sure of *where* one belongs’ (1996: 19). The perception of the contingency of national, religious or cultural values is heightened by travel, and this perception, as well as generating a sense of uncertainty, produces a wide spectrum of reactions. What appears unfamiliar, strange or alien may be the object of hostility and motivate a more vigorous attachment to the beliefs and practices that constitute a sense of belonging to a given community.²² For many travellers the return home is a source of considerable enjoyment. Alternatively, travel may be a means not of questioning but of asserting a feeling of adherence to a group and of participating in easily identifiable constructions of place: the journey for the pilgrim is intended to enhance a pre-existing sense of personality,

while the itinerary of the tourist is rarely flexible.²³ Moving between spaces and recording that experience is a way of touring some of the basic assumptions of one's own culture: the writer may be tempted to reiterate the judgements of earlier accounts and thus perpetuate an older history of travel and representation. In instances that are perhaps rarer, the impact of an encounter with another country may be a liberation from the stultifying conditions of home or lead to more problematic understanding of conventions that are habitually relied upon to make sense of the world. Travel is a useful means of gaining self-knowledge and a spur to looking back on one's 'home'. In upsetting a vision of what is familiar, agreed upon or seemingly natural, it may incite criticism of restrictive notions of gender, sexuality or ethnicity.²⁴

The issues that travel writing raises concerning identity are all related to the question of how different cultures, peoples and places are represented. Almost by definition, the genre presents encounters with people who, belonging to other traditions of thought and behaviour, can only be 'partially known'.²⁵ Much of the interest that travel writing has raised, since the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), has focused on what it reveals about European attitudes towards non-Western cultures. When seen as a manifestation of a larger discursive and institutional framework, the literature of travel and exploration provides clues to the development and the everyday working of colonialism; it gives some indication of the characteristics that are projected onto the subjects of Western domination; of the insertion of indigenous cultures into rhetorics of imperialism; of the role that one community may serve in the self fashioning of another. It tells of the dissemination of the stereotype as a means of interpreting and acting upon reality and of how images of the exotic were manufactured and consumed both in outposts of expansionism and within metropolitan culture.²⁶ It allows an insight into the production of the other as an object of Western desire but also of the complexity of the encounter between colonizer and colonized. Travel literature as a whole provides detailed accounts of places that Mary Louise Pratt has defined as 'contact zones', social spaces where different communities not only interact but 'clash and grapple with each other' (1992: 4). In the context of colonialism, the contact zone is a space of radical – social, racial, religious – inequalities, but it is also one, as Pratt's work explores, where some kind of circulation of cultures, some element of 'transculturation', in however partial or compromised a form, occurs. By its very nature, travel writing involves the translation of one sign system into the terms of another, and its study is a means of documenting the negotiation between cultures that takes place at the micro-level in both colonial and post-colonial worlds.

The questions that travel writing provides a medium to explore, whether they concern the limits of personal autonomy, the coercive power of collective versions of identity or the problems that attain to representing other cultures and people, all assume an undeniable importance in the context of a regime that attempted to enlist large swathes of the population in its drive to transform the whole of society, and which pursued an increasingly aggressive and expansionist foreign policy. We may tend nowadays to see most travel texts as the work of freelance writers uniquely employed in discovering the attributes of appealing or remote regions of the globe and speaking to an audience which sees travel largely as a form of release from the grind of the workplace. But in the Italy of the 1920s and 1930s travel writing was more closely connected with journalism and it could not be said to occur at the margins of politics. Most travel texts were written by figures who worked as correspondents for the national dailies: figures as well known as Emilio Cecchi and Giovanni Comisso worked for Italy's leading newspaper, the *Corriere della Sera*; Corrado Alvaro and Arnaldo Cipolla were employed by *La Stampa*; Luigi Barzini Sr. and Mario Appelius worked for the newspaper that Mussolini founded, *Il Popolo d'Italia*. What were later to become studies of individual countries or regions tended to begin life in the columns of a newspaper. These articles were subsequently printed in book form by leading publishing houses like Treves, Mondadori or Bompiani. The written accounts of journeys were often supplemented by a rich array of photographs so that the reader was offered not only a literary but a visual experience. The appetite of the reading public for works on travel was also supplied by the magazine culture of the time: in 1930 the *Touring Club Italiano* decided to publish a new magazine to accompany the already existing *Le Vie d'Italia*. The new and expensively produced monthly was entitled, *Le Vie del Mondo*, while the Fascist Colonial Institute published its own journal, *L'Oltremare*. Other titles in what was a long list included *Il Mediterraneo*, the illustrated journal of the empire, *Razze e popoli della terra* and *Rassegna dell'Espansione italiana*.²⁷

Though there was some variation in the degree to which any individual writer or journalist was prepared to subscribe to the guiding principles of Fascism, no publication was free from official interference, and most willingly sought to disseminate a vision of the world that accorded with the expansionist ethic of the regime.²⁸ Introducing the Milanese publisher Alpes' collection of books on European countries, Camillo Pellizzi claimed (1926: 5) that the collection was intended to contribute to the 'spiritual renovation' of the country by providing Italian readers with accurate information that would allow them to gain a greater sense of

their own destiny with regard to the rest of the world. The regime was keen to promote a body of work that nourished an understanding of Italy's self-appointed role as an imperial power pitted against the designs of other competing nations.²⁹ Leading figures, including Teruzzi and Pavolini, prefaced some of the more significant texts that were published on the theme of travel and exploration, seeing them as an integral part of Fascist culture.³⁰ Most importantly of all, it was the expansionist foreign policy of the 1930s that gave an impetus to travel writing: all the ramifications of Italian involvement overseas were witnessed and reported upon by the correspondents of the national dailies and these reports were often elaborated into lengthy accounts of a locality or a people. In an international climate increasingly defined by the effects of the Depression and by ideological confrontation, the writers and journalists of the time traced the complex of ideas that motivated Italy's allegiances and its military interventions. They presented the world as it appeared to the architects of Fascism, reporting on Italy's affinities with some nation states and presenting a radically dystopian vision of others. They tracked the assault on Ethiopia in 1935 and they witnessed the involvement of Italian troops alongside the Nationalists in the Spanish Civil War two years later. As Italy fell prey to the mesmerizing example of Hitler's Germany, the more prominent journalists of the moment were dispatched to report on the atmosphere of friendship linking the two modern powers. The opposition of Western democracies to the invasion of Ethiopia meant that both England and France were portrayed as decadent societies unable to understand the dynamism of Fascist civilization. Soviet Russia became the object of a constant stream of derogatory reporting, while the United States, initially viewed with some ambiguity, came increasingly to represent a model of social tension against which Fascism claimed to offer an effective barrier.

The amount of work that can be said to fall into the category of writing about travel is extremely extensive and I do not claim to offer a comprehensive survey of that material. The aim is rather to examine a representative selection of the writing that appeared on a series of key locations in the political and cultural context of the interwar period. Each chapter begins by setting out the type of travel text, from the tourist's diary of impressions to the correspondence of the war reporter, that will be examined and the parameters of the critical methodology that will apply. The first chapter of the book looks at the series of texts that were produced throughout the 1920s and 1930s on the eastern Mediterranean, attempting to relate writing on Italy's colonial possession of Libya to ways of seeing reflections of the ancient past in the present. The study then moves on to look at the record of more distant journeys by

concentrating on works by two of the most prolific travel writers of the age: Mario Appeli's *Indian travelogue* (1925) and Emilio Cecchi's exploration of post-revolutionary Mexico (1932). Given the nature of evolution of Mussolini's foreign policy and the development of world events, the bulk of the study concerns the mid to late 1930s – defined ironically by Leonardo Sciascia as the most comic years of Fascism (1988: 8). The middle section of the book looks at journeys within Italy and the newly acquired empire. More precisely, Chapter Three explores the reactions of a stream of curious visitors to the hallowed sites of the nation and to the rapidly constructed new towns on reclaimed land south of Rome. Chapter Four seeks to unravel some of the narratives of settlement that informed the vision of Ethiopia in the wake of its conquest. The final section of the book examines the slide towards the Second World War first by considering how Italian participation in the Spanish Civil War was perceived in the work of first-hand observers and second by looking at reflections on the gradual process of rapprochement with Nazi Germany. The concluding chapter looks at portrayals of Russia and the United States on the eve of the outbreak of the conflict.

My approach to the travel writing of the interwar period is dependent on critical perspectives that Edward Said's work (1978) and subsequent post-colonial criticism have made familiar. Rather than attempting to see this extensive corpus of writing as a collection of fully autonomous works, the approach seeks to display how the texts – in their representation of authorial consciousness and in the perceptual strategies they deploy – are indicative of the working of larger discursive frameworks. In seeking to identify collective patterns of thought and association within the work of individual authors, the methodology endorses Said's suggestion that every text that sets out to capture the essence of another place is itself ensnared in the web of ideas and images that have previously defined the way in which that place has been imagined or written about. My aim is in part to point to the history of representation in which the travel texts of the period were involved, but it is also to examine how many of the ultra-nationalistic concepts that lay at the heart of Fascist ideology were expressed and elaborated on in the travel writing and foreign correspondence of the time. The myth of Roman dominance, the supremacy of Italian civilization, the irresistibility of collective action, the deification of the leader all exerted their influence over the way in which specific locations were viewed or international events reported. The travel texts of the period thus provide a body of work through which one can see the development of dominant philosophies of identity and demographic expansion; one can see the workings of propaganda and its infiltration and exploitation of more deeply rooted structures of thought. What I have defined as travel writing

may represent an important resource for the study of attitudes and assumptions under Fascism but it is, of course, only one of many such resources and it should not be studied in isolation from other media. Indeed, the analysis of its conceptual structure, of its consistent reliance of certain figures of speech and its depiction of imagined, remembered or anticipated societies leads towards the identification of related strategies of perception and representation across a wide variety of forms of cultural production.

So far I have located the interest of narrated journeys to near or distant localities in the 1920s and 1930s in what it tells us about the dissemination of Fascist ideology and as a site from which one can work outwards to examine the operation of identifiably political kinds of thought. But attempting to read any body of work in these terms runs the risk of suggesting that human beings, however susceptible they may be to societal pressures, are prepared willingly to conform. It may be difficult to deny one of the central tenets of Michel Foucault's work – and a contention that underlies much post-structuralist theory – that the rationalizing principles and disciplinary processes that operate in Western societies apply not only within the social world but also in the way that our very subjectivity, our conscious understanding of our selves, is structured.³¹ But, while recognizing that there are boundaries to personal autonomy, it is important to examine the degree to which individuals consciously subscribe to, unthinkingly perpetuate or attempt to challenge the discourses, or 'webs of signification' (Geertz 1993a: 5), in which they themselves, their personal imaginings, their emotional and thought processes are enmeshed. The travel writing of the interwar period provides some explanation for individuals' investment in the policies of the regime and occasionally striking amplifications of some of its core values. It indicates how people were prepared to adopt subject positions within a range of interconnecting and mutually sustaining discourses: their willingness to accept the role of the colonizer in the expansionist drive of the 1930s; their appropriation of ideas of race or national identity; their purchase on the constructions of masculinity and femininity proposed by Fascism. It suggests some of the processes of negotiation between public statement and private reception. If, as Gentile contends, the new secular religion intended to remould the character of Italians down to their most intimate conceptions of life and death, then the extent of the project is revealed in the altered perceptions of the self and its environment that are articulated within the travel texts of the time.

The writers and journalists who are the object of this study published in the national media of their time and were all, to a greater or lesser degree, sympathizers of the regime – the work of those Italians who

chose the path of exile rather than submit to the constraints of Fascism and who wrote in opposition to Mussolini's foreign alliances and campaigns lies beyond the scope of the present work. My consideration of the writings of those who stayed in Italy throughout the *ventennio* sets out to examine how their work served a propagandistic function but, as importantly, it intends to explore the complexity of their reception of what was the political orthodoxy of their time. The travel writing of the period may indicate a series of essential beliefs but it also provides strong evidence of Fascism's inconsistencies, contradictions and areas of ambiguity. If, as I have suggested, travel writing can be regarded as a narcissistic practice in which the writer constructs an autobiography of impressions and encounters, then it is precisely in the representation of the travelling subject that one finds the most concentrated engagement with the prevailing belief systems of the period. My reading aims to look not only at the details of writers' lives that are contained in the texts and at the apparently straightforward personal reflections that they may contain, but also at the notion of subjectivity that inheres in the writing. Travel, by definition, confronts the individual with circumstances that disrupt the mind or challenge the imagination and my aim is to examine both how writers deployed their imagination and how they attempted to represent disturbances in the functioning of consciousness. In other European contexts some of the most celebrated exponents of literary modernism all wrote travel texts that experimented with new ways of understanding the relationship between time and space, thus bringing formal innovation to a stylistically conservative genre.³² The Italian corpus of the interwar years may not contain the equivalent of works by André Gide or D.H. Lawrence but those practitioners of the genre who have not sunk into oblivion were in some cases aware of or influenced by the imperatives of their European counterparts and owe the survival of interest in their writings to their ability to convey the intricacies of their emotional and intellectual experiences as they negotiated their way through foreign cultures.³³

The variety of motives underlying allegiance to the regime and subscription to its narratives of identity that are evident in the representations of place of the period can be appreciated by looking very briefly at the work of three writers whose names recur consistently in the following pages. An early convert to Fascism, Mario Appellius (1892–1946) worked principally for *Il Popolo d'Italia* though he also wrote for a number of other well known journals, including *La Nazione* and *L'Illustrazione Italiana*. As a foreign correspondent able to publish his articles in book form, he became one of the most well-known travel writers of his age. In the 1920s and early 1930s he produced a narrative

version of his journeys from Morocco to Madagascar (1924), through Central and South America (1929a; 1930) and through South East Asia (1926b; 1929b; 1934a).³⁴ As a war correspondent he wrote on Ethiopia. Having already travelled extensively before Mussolini's assumption of office, he saw Fascism as a movement that could lead Italy towards the assertion of greater power on the global stage and towards the acquisition of extensive colonial territory. His writings provided an indirect and sometimes direct commentary on Italy's imperial ambitions under Fascism. Judging by the ease with which he was able to publish one book of his travels after another, his voice was popular but it was not moderate.³⁵ If he was willing to believe unquestioningly in the right of the Italian nation to expand by force he was equally susceptible to the irrational allure of authoritarianism. The glorification of violence was a constant of his work: during his visit to Japan he admired what he saw as the belligerent temperament of the people (1941: 91); while reporting on the invasion of Ethiopia (1937), he experimented with literary technique in order to convey a vivid impression of the assault on the country (see Chapter Four). In this writing he saw the Fascist nation embodied in the ideal type of the soldier, in the triumphant progress of the army and in the ruthless suppression of the enemy.

A similarly prolific but quite different travel writer was Emilio Cecchi (1884–1966). In contrast to Appelius, who left school at an early age and learnt the journalistic trade quickly through experience, Cecchi began his career as a literary critic, writing for the journals of the Florentine avant-garde, *Leonardo* and *La Voce*. By 1915 he had published a history of nineteenth-century English literature and in the mid-1920s he had begun to publish work on art history that centred on nineteenth-century Italian art (1926) and on medieval and Renaissance Tuscan painting (1928, 1930). He brought his wide-ranging interest in literary and visual culture to his travel writing. He started contributing regularly for the *Corriere della Sera* in 1927 and it was in its pages that his correspondence from different countries appeared. In the 1930s he published books on Mexico, Greece and the United States. Unlike Appelius he was not initially seduced by the appeal of Fascism and had been one of the signatories of the Manifesto of anti-Fascist Italian intellectuals printed in *Il Mondo* on 1 May 1925.³⁶ In the late 1920s, however, he was drawn, in part by necessity, towards a more compromised position.³⁷ His travel writing reveals a highly conservative critic, fearful of the modern world and ready to place his trust in a system of dictatorial power that claimed to protect the basic structure of Italian society. He was prepared to elide liberalism and Fascism, and his travel writing developed a vision of Mussolini's government as the guarantor of Italy's classical heritage. His writings on

the changing urban fabric of Italy in the 1920s and 1930s drew ingenious analogies between what he saw and earlier expressions of religiously inspired architecture. His fascination with transience and immortality, with funerary rites and monumental sculpture, led to an interpretation of Marcello Piacentini's massive building projects in Rome and elsewhere as temples that celebrated the memory the nation's religious inheritance (see Chapter Three). Within such writing he asserted his own presence by articulating the mystic suggestions of the architecture and by linking the cult of the nation with more ancient rites of observance.

One might argue that the travel texts of the interwar period are a source that reveals much about the reception of authoritarian ideas among a wide selection of Italian men but that these texts, given that the overwhelming majority of them were male-authored, have little to say about Italian women and Fascism. Such an argument is, however, true only up to a point. During the years of the consolidation of power, the journalist and art critic, Margherita Sarfatti (1880–1961), was influential in propagating the new style of identity politics, in orchestrating its aesthetics and in promoting its veneration of particular figures and institutions.³⁸ She drew a number of leading Milanese artists, including Mario Sironi, towards state patronage, while *Dux* (1924), her biography of Mussolini ran through no fewer than seventeen editions between 1926 and 1938.³⁹ But as well as performing a prominent role as a cultural organizer and, more discreetly, as the Duce's 'other woman' – to quote the title of Cannistraro and Sullivan's biography (1993) – she was also an accomplished travel writer. She travelled to Tunisia in the 1920s, to Egypt as a correspondent for *La Stampa* in the early 1930s and between 1936 and 1937 she moved through the high society of the United States as Mussolini's unofficial ambassador. The textual record of her journeys displays a familiar chauvinism: she was as keen as most observers of her day to raise her voice in favour of Italy's right to spread the model of its own civilization both within the Mediterranean and elsewhere. Yet, her travel journalism is most interesting in the way in which it served as a vehicle to express a coherent feminist argument at the heart of Fascism. Though she contributed actively to shaping a discourse aimed at exalting a certain kind of masculinity, she suggested both implicitly and explicitly in her travel writing that Italian women should seek to emulate the same kind of pioneering spirit.⁴⁰ The presentation of imposing female figures from other cultures, whether the Egypt of antiquity or the America of the New Deal, was supported by the subtlety with which she constructed an image of herself in her writing.

There are, then, important differences in the work of the three writers that I have selected. They all saw themselves as occupying an important role in the dissemination of a nationalistic worldview, they all celebrated

the grandeur of Italian civilization, and yet each invested in a particular interpretation of Fascism. Despite the varying degrees of originality that they showed, none was an isolated voice. The purpose of this study is, in part, to investigate similarities and dissimilarities in the perception of foreign spaces in the work of an extensive selection of travel writers. By so doing, it aims to look at how the fantasies, beliefs and prejudices that made up Italian Fascism exerted an appeal both at a rational and irrational level. It is not my intention to suggest that elements of Fascist ideology were either necessarily compelling or all pervasive, it is rather to consider how in a series of formally similar texts the expression of comparatively recent concepts of order and belonging were grafted onto pre-existing ways of thinking and interwoven with the representation of the psychological processes of the individual. Writers of the sophistication of Cecchi or Sarfatti deliberately drew their reader's attention to the derivation and to the ramifications of their aesthetic judgements. They alluded to the inconsistencies of memory and, to a degree, their writing was intended to be a speculation on their own consciousness of identity. In their observation of themselves and of other people, they reflected on the impact of political, cultural and social change. They were, within the terms of their own frame of reference, aware of the relation between subjectivity and ideology.

As well as looking at the extent to which the construction of the travelling subject was bound up within the discourses of the time, the study sets out to examine how the inhabitants of other cultures were represented. The delineation of the ideal Fascist type involved, as George Mosse has written, the formulation of its counter-type (1996: 249). Insofar as they represent a catalogue of strategies of perception and inference, the travel texts of the interwar years prove a valuable resource in mapping the desires, investments and projections that were central to a vision of the world as a series of competing ideologies and of territories that awaited colonization. As we might expect, accounts of the most dramatic episodes in Italian national life of the 1930s, the invasion of Ethiopia and participation in the Spanish Civil War, legitimated aggression by the way in which they portrayed those who opposed the tide of expansionism. Yet the processes through which the enemy was rendered the fitting object of violence were never simple, depending as they did on the deployment of recognizable stereotypes and on a vocabulary of religious derivation. As colonization gathered momentum other strategies were relied upon to sustain Italy's putatively civilizing mission, to encourage a sense of racial and cultural superiority and to inscribe the indigenous population of the country's overseas possessions within that narrative. In the late 1930s the racist association of moral attributes with physical characteristics was

given renewed impetus by the rise in anti-Semitism. Yet at the same time as the travel accounts of the time asserted rigid distinctions between self and other, they also provided some instances of dissidence where a general view of a foreign community was, to whatever degree, questioned and where the boundaries between identity and difference did not remain fixed.

A criticism that can be raised against the analysis of a type of literary production that flourished under Fascism is that, by concentrating on the work of figures who were for the most part convinced supporters of Mussolini and who were often willing to tailor their observations to the demands of the regime, it may tell us something about officially sanctioned perception but it does not address the more complex problem of how far the views expressed in such writing were shared beyond a rather select community. The study does not claim to answer this question but it does seek to engage in a variety of ways with the issue of the wider resonances of the texts. Wherever possible the analysis of the work of established journalists and writers is substantiated by the consideration of work by occasional travellers and by people who did not write as professionals. Secondly, there was a persuasive dimension to much of the travel literature of the period: the writer made every effort to convince the reader of the accuracy of the representation that was set before them and in so doing he or she made appeals to what were perceived to be the susceptibilities, the prejudices and the different levels of cultural preparation of the reading public. An idea of the reader was, in other words, part of the text. The avowed aim of many writers to represent an Italian consciousness in foreign parts is an issue that is of central importance. Lastly, the travel writing of the interwar years cannot be analysed in isolation from works written after the fall of Fascism by those who participated in the formation or the dissemination of its cultural geography. The identification of the narratives of Italian expansionism in the travel texts of the *ventennio* leads directly to the wealth of writings that look back at personal involvement in the initiatives of the regime: one literary practice opens the door to another that is similarly concerned with the representation of the self in relation to its group identity. The correspondence on the Spanish Civil War can usefully illuminate written memories of the conflict, but perhaps the most interesting comparisons between a contemporary vision of reality and one that was later mediated through memory relate to Italian East Africa. It is by referring to this body of memorial literature that one can gain a sense of the degree to which the view of the newly acquired African colonies that the journalists of the regime were eager to promote coincided with or contradicted with ordinary Italians' experience of empire.

Notes

1. The following comments on the range and type of research that has been carried out in recent years on the origins and development of Fascist culture are not intended to offer a comprehensive survey. Inevitably schematic, they are meant simply to indicate the scholarly context, or rather the current of historiographic research, in which the present work is situated. The body of texts on which my comments are focussed is described by Jeffrey Schnapp, in his introduction to the special issue of the *Journal of Contemporary History*, 'Fascinating Fascism', as work which, spanning a wide array of disciplinary areas, pursues 'a differentiated cultural history of Italy's fascist decades' (1996: 237).
2. Zeev Sternhell (1994) locates the birth of Fascist ideology in the unexpected convergence of the thinking of Enrico Corradini and his Nationalist Association with the revolutionary syndicalists: though coming from opposite ends of the political spectrum, both were drawn to the myth of national regeneration and the promise of political upheaval that a major war between European nation states seemed to offer. For an analysis of avant-garde culture centred on the Florentine journal, *La Voce*, see Walter Adamson (1993). On the origins of Fascism and on the actual taking of power by Mussolini, see the work of Adrian Lyttelton (1973), Emilio Gentile (1975) and Roberto Vivarelli (1991).
3. On the transformative myth of the nationalist war, see Isnenghi (1973).
4. *Il culto del littorio* is published in English as *The Sacralization of Politics* (1996).
5. In *Il mito dello stato nuovo* (1999), Gentile traces the history of the myth of the radically new state from its beginnings, in the writings of Giuseppe Mazzini and other theorists of the Risorgimento, through to the nationalist groupings of the early part of the twentieth century and eventually to the thinking of Mussolini and his followers.
6. On the history of the town square as the locus of ceremony and public gathering in post-unification Italy, see Isnenghi (1994).
7. The cult of Mussolini and the succession of mass rituals were both accentuated by Achille Starace, Secretary of the Partito Nazionale Fascista (1931–39). On Starace's running of the party machine, see Marco Innocenti (1997).
8. The interpretation of ritual draws on the work of Clifford Geertz (1993b: 87–101).
9. Schnapp argues that the body of academic work that addresses the manifold aspects of Italian culture in the interwar years aims precisely 'to get inside Fascism's power of fascination' (1996: 237). On the symbiosis between art and Fascist ideology, see Matthew Affron and Mark Antliff (1997) and Emily Braun's study of the work of Mario Sironi (2000).
10. The example of Rome's grandeur, as Falasca-Zamponi documents (1997: 90–100), had certainly exercised a powerful influence on preceding periods of Italy's history. Mazzini and other theorists of the Risorgimento referred to Rome as a model for Italian unification, while in the early years of the twentieth century the memory of Rome was central to nationalist thinking. On the ideological significance that Rome assumed in the 1920s and 1930s, see also Marla Stone (1999) and Maria Wyke (1999).
11. See also Morgan (1995) on the link between domestic and foreign policy in the Italy of the 1920s and 1930s.
12. Luisa Passerini's work on biographies of the Duce (1991) explores in detail the wealth of irrational identifications that the public of the *ventennio* were invited to make.

13. The text is published in English as *Fascist Modernities* (2001).
14. Specifically on this point, see Ben-Ghiat's essay on the aesthetics of the 'Third Way' (1996).
15. The allusion is to the title of Mabel Berezin's work (1997).
16. Bonsaver sees the evolution of the Press Office, which was to become the Undersecretariat of State for the Press and Propaganda in 1934 and finally the Ministry of Popular Culture in 1937, as being given a particular impetus by the example of Goebbels' creation of the Ministry of Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda on the Nazi assumption of power (2003: 167–70). For an analysis of state organization of the media of cultural diffusion, Philip Cannistraro's *La fabbrica del consenso* (1975) remains fundamental. The increasing anti-Semitism of state censorship in the late 1930s is the subject of Giorgio Fabre's work (1998). Romano Canosa (2002) has examined the role of the press agency, l'agenzia Stefani, in the regulation of the press.
17. For an account of daily life under Mussolini's rule, see Alexander De Grand (1982), Danilo Veneruso (1986), Philip Morgan (1995) and Patrizia Dogliani (1999).
18. For an analysis of the state's system of patronage, see Ben-Ghiat (2000) and Stone (1998).
19. Important studies of this type would include Passerini's work on the cultural experience of the working class of Turin (1984) and Victoria De Grazia's analysis of the impact of Fascism on the lives of Italian women (1991).
20. In the view of Peter Hulme and Tim Youngs (2002: 9), the interest that travel writing now receives in academic writing is unprecedented. James Duncan and Derek Gregory similarly refer to an explosion of interest in the genre (1999: 1).
21. Writing about the journey, to quote Charles Grivel (1994: 254), means writing about the self. The issue of the relation between travel and autobiography is explored in detail by Derek Duncan (2002) through an analysis of the work of Giovanni Comisso.
22. For a discussion of the dependency of identity on constructions of location, see Carter, Donald and Squires (1993).
23. Bauman's essay on travel and identity (1996) focuses on these two types of traveller.
24. The importance of foreign travel as a means of looking back at home is one that is examined in detail by a number of studies that are centrally concerned with travel and gender: Dea Birkett's work, for example, on women explorers of the Victorian age (1989) and Sara Mills' study of women, travel writing and colonialism (1991).
25. The quotation is taken from Harry Liebersohn's inquiry (1996: 628) into the nature of travel writing's struggle to witness other cultures and people.
26. The implication of travel writing in the history of colonialism has, since Said, been well established. On the importance of the stereotype, the reference is to the work of Homi Bhabha (1994). For a discussion of the changing meaning of the exotic, see Chris Bongie (1991).
27. Richard Bosworth has examined in detail the impact of the regime on the tourist industry (1997a) and the attempt of the *Touring Club Italiano* to retain some autonomy under the pressure of state intervention (1997b).
28. For a record of the increased level of intervention in the way in which Mussolini's wars of the late 1930s were reported in the *Corriere della Sera*, see Licata (1976: 278–94).

29. For details of state sponsored initiatives to promote an interest in expansionist or colonial themes, see Chapter One.
30. Attilio Teruzzi (Minister for Italian Africa 1939–43), for example, wrote the preface to Alessandro Melchiori's account of a journey to Italy's newly established empire (Melchiori 1938). Alessandro Pavolini provided an introduction to Giovanni Cenzato's *Itinerari provinciali* (1938). Before becoming Minister for Popular Culture (1939–43), Pavolini was himself a correspondent for the *Corriere*.
31. See McNay (1994: 4–5) on the significance of Foucault's questioning of the concept of the fully reflexive rational subject for later post-colonial and feminist theory.
32. André Gide, Federico Garcia Lorca and D.H. Lawrence all wrote significant texts that experimented with the formalities of the genre. For a discussion on travel, literary modernism and English literature, see Andrew Thacker (2003). European travel literature of the 1930s is considered in Burdett and Duncan (2002).
33. Though the names of many of the most prolific travel writers of the time have now become unfamiliar, it is worth recalling that writers and critics of the standing of Massimo Bontempelli, Carlo Emilio Gadda and Mario Praz also wrote as travellers.
34. A complete list of Appellius' publications can be found in Livio Sposito's biography of the writer (2002: 333–34). A different account of his life is presented in his autobiography, *Da mozzo a scrittore* (1934b).
35. His African travelogue, *La sfinge nera* (1926a), proved a considerable commercial success selling over 40,000 copies and running through four editions (Sposito 2002: 129).
36. See Del Beccaro (1979: 256).
37. Cecchi has been regarded in Italy as one of the nation's greatest literary critics of the twentieth century. It is only recently that this reputation has come under more intense scrutiny: Ben-Ghiat has noted, for example, that he became a member of the Accademia Nazionale only after it had embraced anti-Semitism and she has pointed to his escape from censure after the Second World War (2000: 272, 333).
38. The importance of Sarfatti as a figure who reveals many aspects of her time is reflected in the fact that she has been the object of two biographies in recent years, by Philip Cannistraro and Brian Sullivan (1993) and Simona Urso (2003).
39. The figures are given by Cannistraro and Sullivan (1993: 305–6). As they note, the book was not only an instant best-seller in Italy, it was also hugely successful abroad and played, 'a major part in making Mussolini a pre-eminent international figure in the 1920s while doing the same for Sarfatti'.
40. On the adoption by a number of prominent Italian women of a Fascist rhetoric of virility, see Barbara Spackman (1996: 34–48).

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Chapter 1

Signs of Roman Rule:

Italian Tourists and Travellers in the Eastern Mediterranean

The eastern Mediterranean was a common destination for many of the well-established travel writers of the interwar years. Raimondo Falci (1925), a correspondent of *Il Giornale d'Italia* and *Epoca*, travelled through Egypt, Palestine, Greece and Turkey in the early 1920s, and in 1925 his elegantly printed travelogue, *L'Oriente sacro e l'Italia* [Italy and the Sacred Orient], appeared with a photograph of one stage of his journey on every page. In 1930 Arnaldo Cipolla, perhaps the most prolific if not the most imaginative travel writer of his age, made the journey down the Nile. Three years later he organized a similar journey by following the footsteps of Alexander the Great. Margherita Sarfatti's first travelogue was an account of her stay in Tunisia (1923), while in the spring of 1933 she followed the Italian royal family on their trip to Egypt and several months later recorded her impressions for *La Stampa* in a series of descriptions of ancient tomb paintings and sculptures. Franco Ciarlantini had travelled to Tunisia and Libya in the late 1920s and written of his experiences in his significantly entitled volume, *Africa Romana* (1928).¹ In June 1934 he returned to the coast of northern Africa to begin his account of a journey that took him to the Holy Land and through the Dodecanese (1935). In 1934 Domenico Tumiati presented a highly literary account of a journey through Greece, and two years later Emilio Cecchi published *Et in Arcadia ego*, the narration of an itinerary that encompassed Crete, Delphi, Olympia, Argos and Ephesus.² As the title of the work suggested, he wrote with sensitivity and with a strong sense of affinity for the civilization of ancient and modern Greece.³

The poet Luigi Orsini claimed that one of the merits of Fascism was to have encouraged Italians to travel within the Mediterranean, and that a

whole new literature made up of 'notations from personal logbooks, descriptions of countries, archaeological evocations, artistic visions' was appearing in newspapers, in magazines and in book form.⁴ From the late 1920s through to the outbreak of the Second World War, a raft of less well-known figures in the literary world and of occasional writers followed organized tours that went to Alexandria, Palestine, Rhodes, Istanbul and Athens: they enjoyed mingling with the privileged classes of other European nations as they stood before the pyramids of Giza, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, Knossos or the Acropolis.⁵ Among those who were able to travel in this sort of style and then write of their experiences were Pina Ballario, a successful writer of children's fiction, and Emma Bona who, as a teacher of Italian literature, had written a well-received history of the Renaissance explorer Alessandro Malaspina.⁶ Other names that were to leave a published trace of themselves through the written accounts of their journeys to the East were Amalia Baccelli (1936), Dante Bolaffi (1931), Carlo Manzini (1934) and Gisella Craig Fadin (1933). While the writings of those who travelled principally as tourists may have displayed fewer linguistic innovations or metaphorical constructions than the books or articles which better known writers were able to produce, they nevertheless shared many common features: they obeyed the same generic conventions, they drew on the same precedents and they attempted to address the same kind of public – those who had not seen the sites that they described.

In his work on tourism and semiotics (1988), Jonathan Culler argues that no site, however 'authentic' it may seem, can be experienced in a way that is unmediated since the physical perception of a site encourages an awareness of the complex of literary, historical and religious associations that have marked that site as important and have established its place on a tourist itinerary. For Culler, tourism means relating a given place to a set of representations or 'markers', and as such it is a practice that promotes the perception and description of sign relations (1988: 155). By travelling from one extraordinary sight to another on a predetermined itinerary, the tourist both makes and accepts distinctions between what is 'sight-worthy' and what, for want of a better word, is invisible (Rojek 1997: 52). Engaged in an activity that appeals seductively both to the senses and to the imagination, the tourist is necessarily caught up – intellectually and physically – in shared codes or ways of understanding historical or cultural meaning. The most striking feature of the accounts of journeys to the eastern Mediterranean, whether written by Italian tourists or by travel writers following a tourist itinerary, is not the individual but the collective nature of the experience that they record. Beginning with narrative descriptions of Greece and Egypt but moving on towards Libya – Italy's

‘fourth shore’ – the following analysis relies on theoretical work on the mechanics of tourism to explore the inferences that various travellers made and the relation of these inferences to prevailing notions of national identity and territorial expansion.

Though they may not have used the vocabulary of semiotics, in travelling from one place of enormous symbolic significance to another, the tourists of the interwar years were consciously engaged in drawing relations between the sites that they saw and recollected representations of those sites. In a letter to Romain Rolland of 1936, Freud speculated on the deep-rooted psychological reasons which motivated his sense of astonishment, when standing in front of the Acropolis, at the actual existence of the monument (1991). A similar sense of satisfaction mingled with disbelief was registered in many Italian accounts of travel to the Mediterranean sea-board. Ciarlantini, for instance, claimed that the journey assailed the traveller with apparitions and echoes from the past (1935: 1). While the pleasure of travel for many tourists lay in seeking a correspondence between what they saw with their own eyes and what they had previously only heard or read about, for many there was also the idea that the journey led to a kind of revelation. In visiting a selection of places in Egypt, Greece and Palestine, they came closer to what they considered to be the origins of their civilization and their religion. In the words of Raimondo Falci, the purpose was to travel to where the ‘light of faith’ had illuminated humanity and unleashed its latent spiritual potential (1925: iii). The interest in journeying to the origins of Christianity or Greek civilization was matched by a concern to reach an enhanced understanding of what it meant specifically to be Italian. At the same time as he spoke of the universality of faith, Falci wrote of developing an *Italian* knowledge of the East (viii), while Ciarlantini asserted that within every Italian there lay a physical feeling of belonging to the Mediterranean (1935: 1, 45).

Emphasis on the discovery of the origins of Western civilization was accompanied by interest in the spectacular archaeological excavations of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: the monuments and artefacts which Schliemann had uncovered at Mycenae, Evans at Knossos and Carter in the Valley of the Kings were the object of intense curiosity and were extensively commented upon.⁷ The desire not only to see these things but to be photographed close to the pyramids or the Lion Gate pointed to the circle of repeated experiences around which the travellers moved: expectations of what they would see were shaped culturally and commercially, past journeys provoked present excursions which would, if narrated, encourage others to travel. While more literary visitors to Greece might refer to the earlier appreciation of celebrated

writers – Cecchi felt he was following in the footsteps of Goethe and Byron, while Tumiatì declared his desire to relive scenes from D'Annunzio's macabre drama *La città morta* [The Dead City] (1898) – other travellers were informed by the learned opinion of Italian archaeologists or referred to the Thomas Cook booklet, *How to See Greece*.⁸ Whatever their cultural preparation or social standing, however, they tended to see the same kind of space, one which was, to paraphrase Barthes (1973: 75), made up of a web of temples, tombs, palaces, sculptures and museums. This privileging of an interest in the material remains of the past over the reality of the present reinforced a hierarchy of what was worthy of attention and what was not: the anxiety to see the tomb of Tutankhamen, the scenes of Biblical stories or the Greek myths was accompanied by a comparatively superficial interest in more modern social structures.

As they moved from one point on their itineraries to another, the tourists of the 1920s and 1930s sought to experience not only a sense of the ancient societies whose surviving sites they saw, but they also endeavoured to develop an imaginative understanding of the transcendental beliefs that animated those societies and they explored the layering of symbols, fantasies and legends which surrounded one site or another. All the texts tended to be structured around the narration of intense moments when the writer recorded a sense of reality being eroded by a perceived engagement with myth. The physical feeling could be heightened by night-time visits to Greek temples or to the interior of Egyptian tombs. Recounting her visit through the chambers of the royal palace of Knossos by candle light, Emma Bona wrote of the 'oriental night mixing its fantastic shadows with the shades and glimmering light of a living legend' (1938: 132). A similar experience of 'ecstatic contemplation' was recorded by Maria Benzoni who, visiting the pyramids by night, wrote of seeing the ghostly double of one of the dead pharaohs and of remaining perfectly still, anxious to hear the echo of voices from within ancient tombs (1935: 55). In most of the writing a distinction was maintained between reality and illusion but there was a varying degree of explicitness with which the figurations of ancient myth could be sensed. At successive stages of his journey through Greece, Tumiatì, echoing D'Annunzio, wrote of his encounters with the characters of Greek myth: he saw the Graces appear with the first rays of dawn (1934: 12), witnessed Maia descend from the constellation of the Pleiades (61) and encountered Athena in personified form (99).

Perhaps the most subtle example of this type of writing was Cecchi's *Et in Arcadia ego*, where the impression of an understanding of earlier perceptions of reality was achieved largely through critical speculation

on surviving examples of ancient statuary or on the artefacts contained in the museums of Athens. Writing on the National Museum's collection of painted vases, he suggested that the experience was like gazing into a microcosm of life recorded on the negative rolls of a film (1936: 120) and while in Delphi he wrote:

Un senso di vuoto, di deserto ... a poco a poco si aggrava e pesa sul cuore. È il vuoto dove la vita fu più fervida; l'irreparabile deserto, dove abitarono gli Dei. La beltà dei marmi, la sublimità delle loro proporzioni, possono consolarci sull'Acropoli ateniese. E nella solitudine d'Olimpia, fra i grandi velari arborei, è una serenità di malinconico umanismo. Ma a Delfo, la moltitudine dei monumenti senza più volto si disfa e s'uguaglia alla montagna indifferente; una fra le massime testimonianze umane torna in polvere e natura cieca. (1936: 50–51)

[A feeling of emptiness, of barrenness ... becomes slowly more intense and weighs upon your heart. It is an emptiness where life was at its most abundant; there is now an irreparable desert where the gods once lived. The beauty of the marble statues and the sublimity of their proportions may console us on the Acropolis. In the solitude of Olympia, beneath the great arboreal veil, there is a serenity of melancholy humanism. But in Delphi, the multitude of faceless statues are slowly melting into the indifference of the surrounding mountain; one of the greatest feats of humanity is returning to dust and to the blindness of nature.]⁹

The allusion to the metaphysical is contained within the language of the art historian. The perception of the stillness of the site generates paradoxically a feeling of its former vitality. At the same time, the ancient ruins gradually lose their status as symbols dispossessed of meaning, and become the visual indications of a cult that is partially recreated in the prose by the invocation of Apollo and other deities once venerated by the Greeks. Closely related to the idea of a mythic and numinous past time infiltrating the present, is the notion that the past's inscription upon the present is growing fainter: as the worn statues return to the raw state from which they were originally drawn so the palimpsest which has been illuminated by the narrator's reading moves closer to blankness. *Et in Arcadia ego* is both a travelogue and an inquiry into the inscription of the past on the present. In the marketplace of Candia, the narrator claims that everyday reality in Greece possesses something that is both 'remote and fantastic' and that any attempt to see the present as other than a superimposition on the ancient is simply ingenuous (1936: 13).

Sarfatti's writing on Egypt took its starting point from the observation of sites belonging to a tourist itinerary but, like Cecchi's work on Greece, these observations were developed into a series of more complex reflections where her own understanding of the meaning of art and its relation to death and sexuality assumed a prominence that was uncommon for this type of literary production. Referring to the difficulty of gaining a vision of Egypt that was not in some way dictated by oil

paintings from the nineteenth century (1933c), she based her interpretation of the country on the sensation of time that it inspired. Any visitor to Egypt was, she argued, confronted with a reality that confounded an habitual sense of time: episodes from the Bible suddenly seemed comparatively recent; Doric architecture became closer to the contemporary visitor; the proximity of the ancient and modern suggested that immobility was the ‘dominant and obsessive characteristic of Egypt’ (1933a). Immobility was closely associated with a notion of death, but death was understood not in its material reality but as the perpetual continuation of life: artistic representations of moments in the lives of the dead of the distant past had the effect of ‘obliterating millennia’ (1933d).¹⁰ Sarfatti contended that it was the evidence of a human presence on the landscape that allowed any grasp of temporal perspective and more surprisingly, that human fame was co-extensive with time itself. Drawn to the temple of Hapshepsut (1504–1482 BC) at Deir al-Bahri, she represented the Egyptian queen as a model of female power that was all the more impressive because of the ferocity of the challenges to its authority which it overcame (1933c). Yet, she claimed that the achievements of Hapshepsut would have been of little consequence to humanity if they had not been celebrated through the architecture of Senenmut, and that immortality was gained through the meeting of artistic and political genius.

If both Cecchi and Sarfatti travelled more in the past than in the present, then the same was true for those tourists who visited Palestine, where the itinerary of every traveller was dictated by the events of thousands of years ago. Moreover, while the world of the Pharaohs or the Greek gods may have worked on the imagination of those who visited Thebes or Delphi, visiting the Holy Land involved a living and immediate contact with the past. Through the evocative power of place, the modern-day pilgrim could, again in the words of Luigi Orsini, ‘relive the human and divine tragedy of Jesus Christ’ (Benzoni 1935: 8). The tour that was recounted in one travelogue after another generally involved the liner docking in Jaffa-Tel Aviv; from there the tourist would travel by car to Jerusalem and trace the final hours of the life of Jesus from the garden of Gethsemane to the site of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre; from Jerusalem the tour would move to Bethlehem then northwards to Nazareth and finally to the port of Haifa (Benzoni 1935: 84–112; Ciarlantini 1935: 60–72; Bona 1938: 154–61). The visual encounter with the sites of the stories of the *New Testament* was, perhaps inevitably, cast in terms of an occurrence that brought to mind earlier reading experiences: not only was the sight of the Lake Tiberias or the Mount of Olives matched with long-standing mental images, they were also the

stimulus for memories of childhood – with their attendant feeling of unquestioning belief – to come to the fore of consciousness. The climax of the visit for every traveller was the brief space of time spent kneeling before the tomb of Christ: a moment described as the unmediated communication between the Saviour and the individual soul (Benzoni 1935: 96; Baccelli 1936: 76; Bona 1938: 156).

Though the attempt to apprehend a strong sense of religious belief may have inspired some of the most intriguing passages of the travel literature of the time, the attempt in itself could inhibit the investigation of realities that were closer to hand. Various cultural critics speak of tourism being an exercise in type construction (Culler 1988; Rojek and Urry 1997) in so far as the tourist sees, in the country that he or she visits, living or concrete examples of preconceived ideas: the type that is already familiar to the tourist is simply confirmed by the act of travelling. In the narrated journeys to the eastern Mediterranean there are few representations of sustained contact with the indigenous populations of one country or another. When they gazed at the inhabitants of the communities that they toured, the Italian travellers tended to see ancient features on contemporary faces. The present, at least as it was evoked in their prose, was in the grip of the distant past. Cecchi and Tumiatì often saw in the features of the latter day inhabitants of Greece the semblance of a hero or demi-god (1934: 11, 32), while for Ballario it seemed as though the Egyptians who farmed the land close to the Nile had stepped out from the tomb painting of Giza or Sakkara (Ballario 1936: 363). Sarfatti used similar terminology and, in support of her notion that the whole of Egypt was dominated by an atmosphere of immobility, claimed that the ‘physical type of the ancient statues’ was still the same human type of modern Egypt.¹¹

The Political Significance of the Journey

One could argue that many of the ways of seeing that I have so far indicated as typical of the Italian travellers of the 1920s and 1930s were in fact common to most tourists who made, or indeed who make, organized visits to sites of cultural importance within the Mediterranean. The abstraction of the present from a manufactured vision of the ancient, the projection of a notion of the past on to a living people, the chronicling of satisfaction or disappointment as reality is matched against a preconceived idea are all structures that define the attitude of the tourist to reality. The various writers of this kind of literature declared an initiation into the mysteries of ancient culture, they referred to their reading of the

Bible, Greek mythology or *The Book of the Dead* and they speculated on the impact of the life of Christ. A modern-day reader of one or more of these texts can easily identify with some of the attitudes that they display especially concerning the thrill of discovery or the tendency to view a country as though it were one vast museum or interwar equivalent of the theme park. A modern-day reader will also note the repetitive nature of the tourist experience and the continuing fascination of taking photographs of the Lion Gate or the Valley of the Kings. Yet, the further one investigates these texts the more that impression is likely to seem fragile, for despite the apparent universality of some of the impressions that they record, they are in no sense separable from the political climate of their time.

The expression of intense appreciation for another culture – whether of the past or the present – although couched in language that may seem vague or timeless nevertheless contains a concealed articulation of the traveller's own sense of origin and belonging. As they moved through the monumental attractions of the eastern Mediterranean, the Italian tourists of the interwar period drew analogies, explicit or otherwise, between the ancient world and the political and cultural reality that they saw as their own. For most the excitement of seeing a particular site resided in the depth of associations that it allowed the viewer to make and, through the terms of comparison they used between the 'then' and the 'now' or between the 'here' and the 'there', a whole series of desires, projections and identifications – inseparable from their particular historical moment – become apparent. There are instances in the writing of Cecchi on Greece or of Sarfatti on Egypt where the interpretation of the symbolic significance of a scene or artefact may show a high degree of personal involvement but it is more often the case that the recurrence of the same comparisons indicates a less personal and more codified attribution of meaning. Part of the attraction of travel writing is that as a genre it lies between fiction and mimesis: the complex of historical and quasi-religious fantasies that lie slightly below the surface of the majority of travelogues may go some way to accounting for the evident popularity of works on the east of the Mediterranean in the years leading up to the Second World War.

On the itinerary of every traveller were sites that recalled the Roman Empire, and every travelogue contained extensive descriptions of the ruins of temples and cities scattered across the Mediterranean. Maria Benzoni meditated on the 'outstanding fortune' that the last pharaohs enjoyed in living under the guidance of Rome (1935: 77) and wrote that 'through marble even Athens renders eternal the memory of Roman conquest' (1935: 227). On the trail of Alexander the Great, Arnaldo Cipolla discovered one example after another of the extent of Roman

power. Ciarlantini wrote of his journey to see the Temple of Baalbek in Syria (89–94), while Nella Orano (1929) organized the whole of her journey through Algeria around the discovery of the places that once belonged to Rome. Visits to one or many of these sites were accompanied by conventional expressions of wonder both at the extent of the ruins to be seen and at the living testimony of the past that they offered. Most travellers remarked on a feeling of familiarity between the vestiges of ancient Rome that they saw beyond the Mediterranean and those that were rather closer to home. For Nella Orano, the experience of touring the ruins of Timgad was like walking around the Forum in her home city (1929: 127).

Yet these sites were not the object of an interest that was confined to the rational, for it was in these spaces that the ‘spirit’ of ancient Rome could be experienced with overwhelming intensity. To travel from one site to another in either northern Africa or the Middle East was to engage in the mystical discovery of the former Roman presence, to feel the miracle of an ancient society coming to life and to sense a vital personal connection with the past. Ciarlantini spoke of sensing the ‘vibrations of Romanness’ with such force in Libya that ‘whole millennia seemed like seconds’ (1928: 16), and before the ruins of Baalbek, he wrote:

Roma crea edifici imponenti, improntati al suo spirito inconfondibile, dalla Spagna alla Siria, dall’Africa alla Gallia, alla Britannia ... E soprattutto, dovunque si scorgano rovine di Roma splende la vasta poesia della monumentalità, quel sovrumano senso della grandezza, che rende l’edificio quasi tramite superbo fra la terra e il cielo. (1935: 94)

[Rome creates imposing edifices, stamped with her unmistakable spirit, from Spain to Syria, from Africa to Gaul to Britannia ... And above all, wherever one sees the ruins of Rome there shines the vast poetry of monumentality, that superhuman sense of grandeur that makes the building almost like a proud medium between the earth and the sky.]

The sensation that is described here is not unlike that which other tourists attempted to grasp when seeking to relive episodes from Greek mythology or indeed when tracing the footsteps of Christ in Jerusalem. A contact with something that transcended the human was registered and insisted upon: the immensity of the spatial proportions of the ruins suggested the presence of a power that individual consciousness could only intuit. In the language of most observers the attitude of reverence was compounded by an unequivocal admiration of force: dominance and discipline were included in the notion of civilization, which was the object of the sightseer’s esteem.¹² But most of all it was the extraordinary experience of time that was labelled as communication with the ‘spirit’ of Rome. Contemplating the extensive ruins of Baalbek, Leptis Magna or Timgad allowed the viewer to look back over millennia and to see the

world as it appeared in the time of Trajan or Septimius Severus. The sense of astonishing temporal duration that each tourist experienced was expressed in terms of a feeling of the immortality of the collective. The same 'spirit' which had created enduring evidence of itself across the whole of the Mediterranean was that which had, in more recent times, guided Italy to independence and to intervention in the First World War (Ciarlantini 1935: 141) and which any modern Italian, attentive to the language of the past, could feel within themselves. Falci maintained that every stage of a journey to the East, from the sand dunes of the Sahara to the hills of Palestine, offered the means for Italians to witness the achievements of their ancestors (1925: iv) and Benzoni could speak of listening to the voice of 'the mother Rome' and of a faith that was renewed eternally through struggle (1935: 16).

To write about a journey to the eastern Mediterranean was thus to participate in a form of literary production that had a long history but which proliferated in the 1920s and 1930s, namely, the dramatic discovery of signs of Roman rule. It was not only to participate in a literary genre but, depending on the success of the text, to contribute to the dissemination of the veneration of Rome that lay at the heart of the Fascist credo (see Introduction). As early as 1921 Mussolini had declaimed: 'We, the sons of Rome, wish to imbibe the immortal spirit of Rome, so that Italy may once more become the guiding nation of the world'.¹³ As the regime became more established, the imitation of the symbolic language of Rome became more pronounced, while the evidence of the extent of the Roman Empire was referred to more consistently as justification for an imperial foreign policy in the present.¹⁴ Few travel writers were unaware of the relation of their writings to the trope of Rome's apparition that featured in the speeches of Mussolini and in those of the ideologues of the regime. For writers like Cipolla and Ciarlantini, both of whom had been close to Fascism from its beginnings and who saw themselves as apostles of its doctrine, the very purpose of their writing lay in pointing to the dynamism of the Roman example and in drawing elaborate parallels between past and present. Early on in his journey down the Nile, Cipolla had declared: 'The language of the remotest antiquity is closer to our spirit than we may dare to suppose' (1930: 35).

Especially strong in writing of the latter part of the 1930s was the contention that the same sense of awe that one experienced when near to the imposing architectural remnants of the Roman Empire could be felt when close to the giant building projects of the regime. Both Maria Benzoni and Emma Bona compared the marble structures of antiquity with the newly constructed Foro Mussolini (Benzoni 1935: 229–30;

Bona 1938: 63–64). Designed by Enrico del Debbio and completed on the south bank of the Tiber in 1934, the athletics stadium was built in the oval shape of an amphitheatre: its ascending rows of white stone were surmounted by huge male statues, each in a sporting or martial pose and each representing a town or city in Italy in personified form [Figure 1.1]. Part of the complex was to form the Fascist Academy for Physical Education. The Foro was intended to be a place where the youth of Italy could display their physical agility and prowess.¹⁵ In Bona's prose, the newly built stadium was a 'marble temple to the young forces of Italy'; its statues were a perfect fusion of beauty and power; they were akin to the sculptures of the Acropolis, only full of the promise of 'youth and the future' (1938: 63). Benzoni, in the Olympic stadium in Athens, elaborated on the contrast between the spirit of Rome and the spirit of ancient Greece, arguing that while the latter had celebrated the figure of the ephebe, Rome had used the athlete to symbolize its 'cult of intelligent force, of incessant action' (1935: 229–30). On her visit to the temple of Hapshepsut, Sarfatti had made the same comparison with the Foro Mussolini, while in Tell el Amarna, the site of the city Akhenaton had founded as the centre of his monotheistic religion, she had suggested a likeness between the Egyptian ruler and the Italian dictator (1933d). Indeed, her articles on Egypt were less a learned appreciation of antiquity than a reading of the present projected on to the past. Her meditation on the dependence of authority on artistic creation for fulfilment of its yearning for eternal appreciation can be read as a reflection of her own relation, as the author of a hagiographic biography of Mussolini (1926) and as a prominent cultural commentator, with political power.

But, as Falci had declared in the introduction to his work (1925: iv), the history of the Italian presence in the eastern Mediterranean was not one of continual triumph: the decline of empire could be observed as easily as its former glory. The narration of visits to sites of the ancient past was not intended merely as an expression of nostalgia or as a means of conferring the aura of former greatness to the present. Almost without exception, the travel writers of the time suggested that the spirit of Rome that they witnessed had been awoken by the Fascist revolution and that Italy was once more affirming an imperial will that, to quote Ciarlantini, no human force could resist (1935: 3). They were convinced that by communicating the sensations that they experienced when face-to-face with the visible evidence of Roman power they could inspire others with the same kind of feeling, and to this extent they made an active and willing contribution to promoting an increasingly aggressive policy of territorial expansion. Quotations from the speeches of the Duce adorned



Figure 1.1. The Foro Mussolini, Rome, photo by C. Burdett.

many texts, while on occasions the writer would make a rhetorical address to the nation's youth. Benzoni claimed that it was the duty of 'every new Italian to travel the paths of the sea' (1935: 250) and Cipolla suggested that his journey in the wake of Alexander might prove to young people how the destiny of nations had always been decided by 'the courage, the moral and physical qualities of a few men of exceptional valour and indomitable will' (1933: 12).¹⁶

The vision of imperialism that emerged from these writings is one that stressed the exhilaration of reliving the era of Roman domination, but especially commentators like Falci and Ciarlantini also adduced less irrational arguments for expansion. Much of Falci's work concerned what he regarded as Italy's slowness, in over 60 years of national life, in developing a network of dependencies that could rival the possessions of Britain and France.¹⁷ Ciarlantini reiterated Italian bitterness at the settlement of the First World War, arguing that the Treaty of Sèvres (1920) had acceded to all Britain's wishes in the Mediterranean, while frustrating Italian claims on Dalmatia (1935: 151). He denounced British presence in Malta, Cyprus and Egypt as essentially concerned with protecting the country's trade route to India (1935: 10) and he accused the British of deliberately setting Arabs against Jews in Palestine (1935: 68). Benzoni, who regarded British support for Zionism as a means of establishing a favourable colony in the Middle East, levelled the same accusation (1935: 84–85).¹⁸ While Ciarlantini could not help but acknowledge the visible extent of British power, he repeated a common assertion of the time (see Chapter Two), namely, that its foundations were unstable.¹⁹ In contrast, ancient Rome provided an example of disparate communities being united under the *pax Romana* and the return of the rule of the Fasces in the Dodecanese was pointed to as evidence of Italy's capacity to govern. On their return journey to Italy, most tourists made a brief stop in Rhodes (in the possession of Italy since 1912) and this gave them the occasion to admire what they saw as an advanced process of regeneration.²⁰

A sense of the benefits that could flow from contact with the mother country could be obtained from journeys to Egypt as well as from brief visits to Rhodes. When the King and Queen of Italy travelled to Egypt in the spring of 1933 they visited the tomb of Tutankhamen and other tourist sites in the Valley of the Kings. They were received by the Mudir of Assiout and in Cairo by King Fuad. But the main object of their visit, and thus of its accompanying media interest, was the Italian community in Alexandria. The correspondents who reported the event extolled the contribution made by Italian workers and engineers to the infrastructure of the country. They stressed how Mussolini's government had held its hand out to Italians in Egypt and how this gesture was reciprocated by the

community's loyalty to the regime.²¹ On the last day of their visit to Egypt, the royal couple surveyed the public works that had been accomplished by the community, they inaugurated its new schools and they watched as many of its members paraded through the streets of Alexandria. The size and the industriousness of what was referred to as Italy's colony in Egypt was seen by many commentators as legitimating Italian claims for greater influence in the south-eastern corner of the Mediterranean. Falci, who estimated the number of Italians living in Alexandria to be around 50,000, wrote of an historic connection between Italy and Egypt stretching back over centuries (1925: 19), while Ciarlantini spoke of the imperative of seeing not only the past but the present and of imagining what greater economic exchange could represent for both countries (1935: 21, 28, 138).²² Both argued that Italy was more sympathetic to Arab nationalism than Britain and that the Islamic world looked towards Fascist Italy with growing anticipation of future collaboration.²³

Travelling through Libya

Until the invasion of Ethiopia in 1935, it was, however, Libya that offered the most dramatic testimony of the renewal of Roman imperialism. The regime made a concerted attempt to foster interest in the colony as a place that showed the decisiveness of Fascist action in dealing with opposition to its rule and as a site that awaited the influx of waves of Italian settlers. Promotion of the colony made use of all available media: films which glorified the suppression of rebellion were produced; competitions were set up for literary works that celebrated the opportunities offered by the colony; organized trips allowed thousands of Italians to visit the coastal region round Tripoli.²⁴ In the late 1930s, under Italo Balbo's governorship, the arrival of colonizers from the mainland was transformed into a vast propaganda exercise for both domestic and foreign consumption.²⁵ One figure who occupied an important role in presenting Libya as an attractive destination for future colonists was Angelo Piccioli. Director of Education in Tripolitania (Polezzi 2002: 190), he was entrusted with the task of compiling an extensive work that detailed the observable results that had been achieved in the colonies since the transition from liberal to Fascist government. His book, *La Nuova Italia d'oltremare* [The New Italy Beyond the Seas] stretched to two volumes and ran to nearly 2,000 pages with 800 photographs, while Mussolini himself wrote the preface.²⁶ In its relentlessly positive appraisal of the evolution of colonial policy in Libya, the work did not

shy away from presenting the brutal details of the enforcement of Italian rule.²⁷ Indeed, the early chapters that described the pacification of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica under the hand of Graziani, gave a written and photographic account of the concentration camps set up south of Benghazi (1934: 188–205) in order to deprive the leader of the Sanusi resistance, Omar el Mukhtar, of local support.²⁸

As well as articulating the official vision of Italy's overseas territories, Piccioli communicated a more personal interpretation of Libya in his travelogue, *La porta magica del Sahara* [The Magic Gate of the Sahara]. His journey started with an extensive tour of Tripoli, then made excursions to the coastal towns of Sabratha and Tadjura before moving south-west through the mountainous region of the Djebel and onwards across the northern reaches of the Sahara to the final destination of the ancient town of Ghadames. Piccioli was not the first to record his impressions of this route, Raffaele Calzini had undertaken a similar journey in the early 1920s (1926), but his book, as Loredana Polezzi has documented (2002: 190–91), was to prove an immediate commercial success: first printed in 1931, it was reprinted in 1934 and translated into English in 1935. It won the immediate appreciation of the major figures in the colonial hierarchy as well as what any writer of the time would have considered an impressive array of positive appraisals, not only across the whole of the Italian press but also in other European publications.²⁹ Stefan Zweig, no less, claimed that the book would play an important role in making Libya one of the great tourist destinations of the world; the reviewer of *Le Mercure Universelle* (sic) praised Piccioli's sensitivity to the reality of the landscapes of the desert; Carlo Zaghi of *L'Ambrosiano* appreciated the lyricism of the volume; other reviewers marvelled at the author's ability to capture the soul of the country and to involve the reader in a sense of its mystery.³⁰

There is little doubt that a large part of the book's success derived from the seductive picture it presented of Libya. Describing his arrival by steamer at early morning into the port of Tripoli, Piccioli wrote of an arrival on a 'warm fragrant shore' reminiscent of fable or legend (1935: 2). He likened his arrival to the discovery of the land of the Lotus-Eaters or the garden of the Hesperides, and spoke of being assailed by a 'languid, enervating softness' (2).³¹ His sensitivity to the beauty of the natural world around the city was expressed through metaphors that alternatively suggested luxuriance or serenity. But as he began to explore the city, and as he evoked one panoramic vision after another, he described a growing awareness of 'a race and a soul' that were remote from his own (2), and the inquiry into the mentality and lifestyle of the subject population became the major narrative strand of the text. Openly contemptuous of what he

defined as the 'self-styled interpreters of the Arab soul' (13), he claimed to base his assertions on what he saw. He took his reader through the labyrinth of Tripoli's bazaars, through a selection of private houses and through the cemeteries scattered about the edges of the town in search of the set of consistent characteristics that would allow him greater insight. Despite the length of his association with Libya, his book contained few examples of sustained interaction with the indigenous inhabitants of the city or its surrounding towns and, as with his writing on the landscape, he preferred to communicate his impressions through elaborate comparisons.

Gazing at the men and women of the northern coastal region, he appreciated the dignity of their appearance, the solemnity of their greeting one another and 'the austere simplicity of [their] life' (10). Implying a correspondence between people and landscape, he claimed that the native inhabitants of Tripoli valued above all else a state of 'calm immobility' (5). He assumed that this prolonged state of 'nervous apathy', so immediately apparent to a European observer, alternated with 'endless indulgence for the sweet sins of the flesh' (2) and he repeated the notion of the indigenous population being possessed of a 'feline sensuality' (12, 21). Surveying Tripoli from the high flat roof of one house, he allowed his erotic imagination to wander, speculating on how many harems were concealed in the maze of houses below and how many 'human flowers' were 'jealously secreted within them' (8).³² He was also keen to demonstrate his erudition, visiting the larger mosques of the city and supplying detailed descriptions of their interior and external design. Following his intuition that the essence of a culture could be observed in its details, he suggested that the repetition of the same forms, patterns and figurations indicated a 'racial soul' that was characterized by immobility (47). Touring the mosque of Gurji in the centre of the town, he argued that the same disposition towards apathy that he claimed to witness in the behaviour of Tripoli's inhabitants had for centuries defined the mental attitude of Italy's subject population as a whole:

Ma ecco che un giorno questa inquieta e insoddisfatta anima indagatrice si è vista come sorgere dinanzi una barriera insormontabile; futile le è parso l'arraffare della sua fatica, inane lo sforzo per attingere la verità al disopra della vita e al di là del flusso vitale: ed allora essa si è accasciata, si è arrestata, si è addormentata come in un torpore senza riposo. È rimasta immobile, quasi folgorata: non ha voluto più nulla non ha creato più nulla. (1934b: 48)

Finally, however, this anxious soul, dissatisfied with its investigations, saw, as it were, an impassable barrier rising in front of it: its groping efforts appeared futile, hopeless its struggle to reach a truth above human life and beyond its ebb and flow: it was discouraged, arrested, and fell into a kind of restless torpor. It remained stationary, as though struck down, wishing for nothing, creating nothing. (1935: 58)

This interpretation of what he defined as the spirit of Islam would develop as his journey continued beyond Tripoli. As he travelled by car towards the hinterland, leaving the road behind and following the caravan trail first to Nalut and then to Ghadames, his journey gradually assumed the connotations of a voyage from the known world to something altogether more extreme.³³ The impression of having gone beyond an established boundary into a desolate region where human understanding became conscious of its frailties was accentuated by the frequent quotation of voices from within the Western canon.³⁴ The further he and his travelling companions advanced, the more he registered the impression of getting closer to the moods of the earth: the sight of the shifting horizon in the desert was like witnessing a huge palpitation that altered the relation between the earth and sky, or like seeing both elements fused together 'in a dead, frowning, sinister calm' (169). The huge disturbance, provoked by the astonishing scenery of the northern Sahara, to the narrator's ordinary habits of thought and perception was conveyed through the suggestion of the supernatural: the author wrote of his dreams being filled with the presentiment of terror and of his feeling of 'cold dismay' as he surveyed the vast expanse of the desert (193–94). His portrayal of alarm was magnified by the facility of his prose to suggest a spectral presence, lying beyond the possibility of cognisance, yet mocking and defying human laws of perspective and proportion. He described a change in the experience of consciousness so radical as to encourage the belief that he had been granted nothing less than a privileged initiation into the mystery of death. Watching dawn rise over the village of T'gutta on the approach to Ghadames, he wrote:

One felt that one's life had somehow left its ordinary plane, and that one had entered a new state of consciousness ... We were enveloped by the mystery of space, and were so acutely aware of it that it became for us a cosmic element. At certain moments one felt that time had stopped, and that one was in contact with something much more simple and immediate than anything else could ever be – a state of eternity. (196)

In a way that was typical of the book as a whole, the characteristics that the narrator attributed to the landscape were transferred to the inhabitants of the outlying towns of the interior. The impression of eeriness so essential to the book's description of the Sahara was accentuated when Piccioli and his party reached their final destination of Ghadames. Setting foot in the town, the author encouraged his reader to believe that he had entered a space where the spirit of Islam, unsusceptible to the changes that dictated the restless evolution of European nations, could be felt in its most concentrated form. He conveyed a sense of time having come to a standstill and of the trace of antiquity being immediately manifest. The description of the town was densely metaphorical and

through the studied accumulation of related concepts Piccioli passed his final judgement on the collective mentality of the subject Muslim population. The external appearance of Ghadames, in its 'solemn stillness', its 'deathly grandeur' and its 'stony repose' (209), was likened explicitly to that of a tomb. The architecture that rose above its narrow streets, in its dilapidated but grandiose forms, recalled the desolation of a disused cemetery (212, 216) where Death itself seemed to prowl like 'a traveller who could not be touched' (212). Rather than attempting a more objective account of the history of the place and its significance as a site of learning, the narrator's attention focused so entirely on the subjective dimension of his experience that the whole evocation read like a hallucinogenic fantasy. The occasional figures that he and his travelling companions came across stared back with 'glassy, expressionless eyes' (211) and the ancient buildings seemed like a funereal shroud covering the world beneath them (219). The author wrote of the anguish of finding himself trapped and lost in a world that was not his own and of the town's all-enveloping silence broken only by faint, subdued voices heard from a distance: 'All these are the incomprehensible utterances of a different race, that suffers with a different heart and a different soul to ours, a dying race weeping tears over its own destiny' (213).

Within the series of peculiar personal impressions there lay an important ideological insinuation. The ghostly sights and sounds of Ghadames, in allowing the narrator to grasp a fundamental insight into the 'soul' of the race, also provided the interpretative key to the other cultural phenomena he had previously recorded. The principle of inertia apparently governing the behaviour of the Arab population, the evidence of past magnificence being erased by encroaching decay, the partiality for pleasures of an erotic kind were all indications of a race and a culture that were in terminal decline. But *La porta magica* was not only a delineation of the soul of the subject population, it also presented an interpretation of the force that lay behind Italy's renewed desire for territorial expansion and a vision of the impact of that force on the indigenous inhabitants of Libya. The description of Tripoli with which the book opened was both an evocation of the exotic and an account of Italy's 'moral and political resurrection' under Mussolini's rule (1934b).³⁵ At the same time as he sought clues to the mindset of the Arab population in the architecture of the mosques in the centre of Tripoli, Piccioli looked for evidence of the spirit that guided the hand of Rome. Of all the sites that he described, it was the Arch of Marcus Aurelius [Figure 1.2] that he found most inspiring.³⁶ Standing next to the monument, he sought to decipher its symbolic significance or, in his words, to listen to the language of its enormous blocks of stone (1934b: 66). The experience was 'strangely

exciting' not so much because the worn marble bore a resemblance to 'living flesh' as because of the strength with which the monument communicated a sense of the spirit of Rome. Shifting between a description of the material sign and an interpretation of its metaphysical meaning, his writing collapsed an idea of Rome with a particular construction of masculinity. The vision embodied in the stone was martial in its bearing, determined in its will to suppress its opponents, austere in its simple morality and supremely confident in its 'unlimited power' (66–67).

In his delineation of the spirit of Rome the narrator described the attributes of the collectivity to which he felt he belonged. The phallocentricity of this understanding of the 'victorious race' (66) was clear enough in itself but it was accentuated by the definition of Arabic culture that accompanied its expression. The 'gigantic power of Rome'



Figure 1.2. The Arch of Marcus Aurelius, Tripoli, photo by Mia Fuller.

stood out against 'the frail, uneasy creations of Oriental races' with their 'untidiness and triviality' (66–67). Despite the sophistication of Piccioli as a writer and despite what many reviewers saw as the poetry of his evocation of place, the essential thesis of his book depended on a series of crude binary oppositions. While professing knowledge of and appreciation for Arab culture, *La porta magica* maintained that the encounter between Italy and Libya was between masculinist notion of vitality and a feminized idea of decadence. Though the text shunned any mention of Arab resistance, the theory of the Italian imperialism that it advanced associated power with the use of force and equated masculinity with mastery. The putative exhaustion of the native population was contrasted with the enterprise of the Italian settlers, 'the sowers of good seed', in the agricultural concessions to the north of the country.³⁷ The episode on Ghadames which brought the narrator's search for a sense of Arab identity to a climax was entitled 'The Silent City of the Dead' while the title of the final chapter – which rehearsed the demographic arguments for expansion and which stated Italy's role as a colonizing power – was 'The Undying Race'.

Del Boca has argued (1994: 167–73) that state-sponsored endeavours to promote a colonial literature that would encourage a wider interest in Italy's expanding empire were largely a failure because most willing practitioners of the genre rarely succeeded in representing anything other than romantic liaisons between Italian soldiers and African women or languid descriptions of the desert landscape. He gives the example of Mario Dei Gaslini's novel, *Piccolo amore beduino* [A little Bedouin love affair] (1926), as typical of a genre that drew its inspiration from copying the style of Pierre Loti (1850–1923) and Pierre Benoit (1886–1962). What Piccioli's text undeniably succeeded in doing was to link the exoticism and the eroticism that predominated in other texts written on a colonial theme with a vivid interpretation of the supposed vitality that renewed Italian imperialism brought with it. Thus, at the same time as a reader followed the flights of the author's imagination, he or she was exposed to a justification of Italy's role in Africa. In the view of Mussolini, the book was 'magnificent'.³⁸

Conclusion

When compared with the complexity of Giuseppe Ungaretti's representation of the Italian community in Alexandria (1961) from the perspective of a former inhabitant of that community, or with Enrico Pea's narration of the early part of his life in Egypt (1949), the many

tourist accounts of journeys to the eastern Mediterranean in the 1920s and 1930s show only a limited awareness of the intertwining, merging and fragmentation of cultures.³⁹ But these accounts do provide considerably more than a series of predetermined responses to sites of exceptional cultural significance. The itinerary which dictated the movement of the majority of travellers was sustained by a narrative of a return to the origins of Western civilization, and it deliberately promoted the experience of certain sensations: a sense of the sublime in front of the monumental buildings of the past; an appreciation of the spirituality of ancient communities; a perception of the links binding earlier millennia to the contemporary moment. What is perhaps most interesting in these recorded sensations, as I have suggested, is the way in which core elements of Fascist mythology infiltrate the idea of antiquity that they communicate. When they expressed their marvel at the architectural splendour of rulers of ancient Egypt or drew comparisons with the stadia of ancient Greece and the Foro Mussolini, the various tourists were not so much parading their subservience to the regime as emphasizing what they saw as an obvious continuity between past and present: the rule of Mussolini was not necessarily something new or different but the expression of elements of Mediterranean civilization that could immediately be observed in one locality after another.

Woven into this perception of place was an apologia for national expansion. Though not all descriptions of journeys to places within the Mediterranean articulated the fantasies that subtended the imperial project with the same eloquence as *La porta magica del Sahara*, most participated in a narrative of one culture overcoming another. Yet, however crudely such statements were articulated, they often contended with a more assimilatory approach to other cultures. Both established propagandists and more humble tourists felt no inconsistency in using other societies as a means of looking back at their own. In her articles on Egypt, Margherita Sarfatti advanced a notion of the superiority of 'white civilization' (1933d), but, as she did so, she used the example of ancient Egypt to deliver a view on the relationship between monumental architecture and political power, and she presented, through her portrait of Hapshepsut, an idealized female role model.⁴⁰ Inscribed in what was essentially an imperial model of European civilization were elements of one of the Mediterranean cultures that Italy looked upon – in the event of a weakening of British power – as a potential site of expansion. Within the insistent nostalgia for the glories of Rome that defined much travel writing of the 1920s and 1930s, there was often an appreciation of a system of government that was *receptive* to the architectural and spiritual example of ancient communities in Greece and Palestine.

This is not to argue that the logic of imperialism – as it was received and elaborated upon in writing that reflected the imposition of Italian rule in Libya and that advocated expansion elsewhere in the Mediterranean – simply combined the brutal assertion of national interest with an apparently more benign philosophy that allowed for the possibility of cultural integration. It is rather to suggest that the rhetoric of domination itself involved the assimilation of ideas, concepts and images that were drawn from the very cultures that Italy either ruled or aspired to possess. In the travel narratives of the time, any expression of appreciation for the eclecticism of the Roman Empire went hand in hand with veneration for the supremacy of Rome within the Mediterranean. But the most dramatic example of the selection and adoption of features of a subordinated culture with the explicit purpose of reinforcing the rule of the metropolis can be seen in the images and the writing that celebrated Mussolini's journey to Libya in 1937.⁴¹ At significant moments within this triumphalist extravaganza, the imperial power attempted to translate its interpretation of itself into the visual language and the symbolic structures that it perceived to be those of the people over whom it exercised its self-appointed rule. Piccioli may have sought to convey his theory of the stasis or decline of Arab civilization through polarized metaphors of gender but, during Mussolini's visit, Italian rule of the colony was presented as the merging of Fascist and Islamic principles. Recurring in written or photographic descriptions of the event [Figure 1.3] was the idea that both ruling and subject population appreciated a common conception of masculinity and shared a common cult of leadership.

The journey occurred in the wake of the successful invasion of Ethiopia and some years after the end of the 'pacification' of Cyrenaica. It was intended to celebrate the material achievements of Fascism in the colony and to send a message to the rest of the world. To these ends, an army of Italian journalists tracked every movement of the Duce, as he officially opened the coastal railway or visited recently established agrarian settlements.⁴² The presence of a corps of foreign journalists was also substantial, yet it was one of the major ironies of the 1930s that the visit, which was intended to symbolize the power of Fascism as a popular movement, coincided with the battle of Guadalajara, the most resounding defeat of Italian troops in the Spanish Civil War (see Chapter Five).⁴³ The journey was also the moment when the Duce reaffirmed his contact with the subject population of Italy's 'fourth shore' and when the front pages of most newspapers were given over to the discourse of Italy's relationship with Islam. The narrative that was disseminated was framed, more or less, in the following terms. It was suggested that though Italy had held in check any Islamic challenge to Western civilization, the



Figure 1.3. Mussolini receives the sword of Islam, Tripoli 1937, unknown author. Reprinted with the permission of the Alinari Archives, Florence.

nation had, since antiquity, shared a common past with its colony.⁴⁴ With minimal reference to resistance to Italian rule, it was claimed that the local community was being reinvigorated through contact with the colonizing power, that it understood the simple language of ‘justice, force, peace and work’, and that Mussolini’s vision of his subjects was one that any Islamic society could readily understand.⁴⁵ In the light of the past example of the *pax romana* and the religious tolerance that was now extended, it was asserted that Italy was better placed than any other Western power to watch over the interests of the Arab world.⁴⁶ Given the brutality of the suppression of the Sanusi challenge to the imposition of colonial authority and the outrage that it had provoked in the Muslim world, the climax of the visit was laden with significance. On 18 March, at the head of 2,000 mounted Libyan soldiers parading through the centre of Tripoli (Valori 1937b), Mussolini was presented with the sword of the protector of Islam.

Notes

1. Franco Ciarlantini (1885–1940) began his political career as a Socialist, his conversion to the interventionist cause led him away from his origins and towards early involvement in the Fascist movement. He was to become a member of the Italian parliament in the 1920s, but the most important role that he fulfilled was as a publicist for the regime. In addition to his many works on travel he also wrote on the meaning of Fascism and on the mystique of Mussolini’s leadership (1933). For more biographical details of Ciarlantini, see Lecco (1981).
2. Tumiatì (1874–1943) is chiefly remembered as a playwright. Cecchi travelled to Greece between June and July 1934 together with his son, Dario. He published five articles on his trip for the *Corriere della Sera* later that year. The genesis of his travelogue is described in detail by Margherita Ghilardi, see Cecchi (1997: 1822–1831).
3. Other texts that should be added to this list are Annie Vivanti’s evocation of Egypt (1925) and Mario Praz’s (1942) record of his journey through Greece in 1931. Marinetti also wrote on his memories of Egypt in *Il fascino dell’Egitto* (1933).
4. Orsini’s comments were part of his preface to Maria Benzoni’s *Oriente mediterraneo* (1935: 7–8).
5. Like many wealthy Italian tourists, Pina Ballario stayed at the Mena House hotel not far from Cairo. While she was there she described taking a picture of the future King George VI (1936: 364–65).
6. Ballario was born in 1903 in Novara. In 1939 she won the Bologna prize for the best work of children’s fiction. Emma Bona was born in Venice in 1904. Her research into Alessandro Malaspina was financed by the Reale Società Geografica Italiana. In her career, she also wrote for the *Giornale d’Italia* and for *La donna d’Italia* (Gastaldi 1936: 101).

7. In her account of a cruise down the Nile, Annie Vivanti had even described a captivating conversation with Howard Carter (1925: 26–33).
8. Pina Ballario's journey to Greece began with her reading of the Thomas Cook booklet. Maria Benzoni, on board the liner 'Pilsna' with the Royal [Italian] Geographical Society in July 1932, commented on the learned instruction that she and her travelling companions received. In her view, the whole of Greece was 'swarming with Homeric and Virgilian recollections' (1935: 153).
9. Unless otherwise stated, all translations from the Italian are my own.
10. The same artefacts also had the effect of establishing a powerful connection both with the tomb painting of Etruria and the Christian philosophy of the afterlife (1933b).
11. In her words: 'It is beautiful to see the fellahin at work: they are as dark and as polished as the basalt of the ancient statues. Even here the earth has maintained its absolute fidelity to a single human type' (1933a).
12. In the ancient city of Timgad in Algeria, Orano wrote of 'civilization, force and power' typifying the rule of Rome and leaping out at the visitor to the site (1929: 161). See also the writing of Angelo Piccioli when contemplating the Arch of Marcus Aurelius in Tripoli (1934: 61).
13. The words of Mussolini form part of the speech that he made at the inauguration of the Circolo Corridoni on 6 April 1921. They are quoted in Cederna (1979: 34).
14. For an extended analysis of the evolution of the official symbolic discourse of Fascism, see Falasca-Zamponi (1997). On the remodelling of Rome as a 1930s equivalent to a theme park where the visitor was encouraged to feel a sense of Roman grandeur at every turn, see Stone (1999).
15. The Foro Mussolini provides a good example of the way in which the regime liked to frame modern institutions as the expression of a Greek or Roman ideal (Piacentini 1933: 65). In the words of one commentator: 'Once more in Italy there reappears the gymnasium of the Greeks and the Romans, the most perfect expression of the Mediterranean spirit and of the Latin world at its greatest moment' (Magi-Spinetti 1934: 91).
16. Nella Orano wanted her text to arouse in 'the soul of young people' the same strong emotion of pride that she had felt on her journey through Algeria (1929: 11).
17. Throughout his journey, Falci (1925) was impressed by the extent of French cultural influence across the south of the Mediterranean.
18. In the view expressed in this part of Benzoni's text, there was a natural affinity between British Freemasonry and Zionism, which was alien to Fascism with its close links to Catholicism.
19. During his brief visit to Cyprus, he felt that he detected that the ostentatiously relaxed attitude of British officials in reality masked a profound unease concerning their status on the island (1935: 97).
20. Referring to the journeys of Fascist youth organizations to Rhodes, Benzoni argued that travel gave a sense of 'our place in the world', it engendered a 'faith in the qualities of our race' (1935: 250). For Ciarlantini, the sign of Italian governance was to be equated with the mark left on the island by the Mycenae, Athens, Rome, and Byzantium (1935: 116).

21. Most reporters claimed that Fascism had reinvigorated the community's sense of belonging to Italy and that this was evident in the number of new schools, Italian newspapers and clubs for veterans of the First World War. In the view of Arturo Lovato (1933), reporting for *La Stampa*, in the 'Italian colonies' of Egypt no one was either hostile or indifferent to Fascism.
22. A large number of texts that detailed the potential for economic exchange between Italy and Egypt were published in the late 1930s. An exhaustive list of publications is to be found in Arangio-Ruiz (1941).
23. This was a view embraced ardently by Ciarlantini (1935: 49). Falci even reported attending, in February 1920, a nationalist meeting in Cairo militating for the abolition of the British protectorate (1925: 14). For Egyptian responses to Italian policy, see Gershoni (2001).
24. One of the most well-known films to be produced on Libya in the 1930s was Augusto Genina's *Lo squadrone bianco*. For an analysis of the film, see Cecilia Boggio (2003). Del Boca (1994: 167–73) discusses some of the attempts made by the regime to promote interest in Italy's 'fourth shore'. For an account of the scientific expeditions that were mounted in the 1920s and 1930s to map the colony for its actual and eventual exploitation, see Atkinson (2003).
25. The most extravagant of these events was the embarkation of 20,000 colonizers on 29 October 1938 from Genoa. They were to arrive in Tripoli on 2 November. For a description of the event and an appraisal of demographic colonization of Libya under Fascism, see Del Boca (1994: 256–71) and Labanca (2002a: 267–309). For a photographic record of the event, see Palma (1999: 146–49).
26. In his comments in the introduction, Mussolini asserted that the book was of fundamental importance to anyone who wished to form a judgement on the achievements of Fascism in the first decade of its rule. He also claimed that the book would convince all of its readers that Italy had become a major colonial power and that its role was to spread civilization through its newer territorial acquisitions.
27. For an analysis of the impact of the colonization of Libya, see Muhammad Jerary (2005).
28. The action of uprooting large sections of the population of Cyrenaica has been described as genocidal in its effects (Salerno 1979; Guerri 1998: 229). Atkinson (2003: 14) documents that even Italian statistics revealed a population decline in the region from 225,000 in 1928 to 142,000 in 1931. Labanca's edited volume (2002b) provides further details on the repression in Libya.
29. Pietro Badoglio, governor of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica (1928–34), described the book as 'an important contribution to the work of propaganda' in describing the beauty of Italy's colony. His comments appeared on the back pages of Piccioli's text.
30. This was the view of Acuzio Sacconi for the *Giornale della Scuola Media* and the unnamed reviewer for *Il Piccolo of Trieste*. The reviews referred to were quoted in the unnumbered pages at the end of *La porta magica del Sahara*.
31. Quotations are taken from the English translation of Piccioli's work (1935) unless otherwise stated.

32. Though the tone of his writing rarely strayed beyond the limits of the proper, it did show a certain affinity with Marinetti's description of Cairo as a libidinal utopia for the European male (1933).
33. In the car with Piccioli were the Italian colonel De Blaw and an English colonial official (1935: 161–62).
34. Nietzsche, for example, on the pathos of the vast expanse of space or Homer on the arrival in the land of the sun (Piccioli 1935: 170). As Piccioli and his party moved beyond Nalut to begin the final part of their journey, then the unacknowledged but clear parallel was with Jules Verne's *Voyage au centre de la terre* (1864), only the notion of travel to the centre of the world was replaced by the idea of travel within the geological time of the earth.
35. This statement was expunged from the English edition of the work (1935).
36. In the chapter entitled 'Monuments and Museums' (66–72), he recounted his visit to the recently created archaeological museum in the fort of Tripoli where he spoke at length to its director, Giacomo Guidi. He observed the museum's collection of marble statues and imperial inscriptions from Leptis Magna and Sabratha as well as observing the office, with its furniture unchanged, of the first Italian governors of Tripolitania.
37. Recording his conversations with Italian settlers, Piccioli contended that they were all living examples of the spirit of Rome. A leading article in the *Corriere* (11 March 1937) maintained that Libya was the 'very centre of Italy's colonial activity and expansion'.
38. The view was reported by De Bono, Governor of Tripolitania (1925–28), in the unnumbered pages at the end of the book.
39. Ungaretti's articles on his return to Egypt in 1931 were published in *Il Gazzettino del Popolo*. The complexity of these articles and their relation to Ungaretti's work as a whole are considered in Lucia Re's examination of Alexandria revisited (2003).
40. Sarfatti was to elaborate her theory of 'White civilization' in her later work on the United States (see Chapter Seven).
41. For an account of the stages of the journey and their significance, see Wright (2005).
42. As well as reporters from all major newspapers, the entourage included some prominent names from the literary and artistic world – Ardengo Soffici, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, Massimo Bontempelli, Amerigo Bartoli – whose role was to glorify each stage of the journey. Emilio Cecchi also lent his considerable powers of imagination to recording the scenery that surrounded the itinerary of the Duce (1937a, b). The strict collaboration between the official view and the journalistic representation was indicated by the gratitude that Mussolini expressed to the press corps and its director, Gherardo Casini, on the journey home, reported in the *Corriere della Sera*, 22 March 1937. A photographic record of the journey was provided by *Il Duce in Libia* (1938).
43. Arturo Pianca (1937) calculated that there were 74 foreign correspondents, including Ward Price of the *Daily Mail* and O'Brien of the *Telegraph*. The interview Mussolini conceded to Ward Price was printed in *Il Popolo d'Italia* on 21 March 1937.

44. The leader article of the *Corriere* of 28 February 1937 was particularly strong on this point. It claimed that any division between Italy and Islam had left no rancour, and even defined Italy as a Muslim power.
45. The idea that the people of Libya appreciated force and were happy to be governed with a 'hard but just hand' was repeated by Valori (1937a) and Lombrassa (1937). Luigi Barzini Jnr. (1937), in an article closely echoing Piccioli's writing, claimed that the local population stood back in admiration before the material evidence of Rome and that Mussolini's vision of a people of 'large families in which men were workers and warriors and women, mothers' was one that they instinctively appreciated. For a detailed account of Libyan resistance to Italian rule, see Ali Abdullatif Ahmida (1994).
46. The reference was to the restoration of religious sites that occurred during Italo Balbo's time as governor of the colony (1934–1940), in a bid to repair some of the damage caused by the 'riconquista' of Libya. On the hostility of the Muslim world created by the pursuit of Omar el Mukhtar and on Balbo's governorship, see Del Boca (1994: 196–97, 233–91).

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Chapter 2

Fascination and Hostility:

Two Ambivalent Accounts of Distant Journeys

In the work of various commentators, the interwar period is defined as the great age of travel. Paul Fussell's history of British literary travelling between the wars (1980) argues that the sense of freedom in the wake of the First World War, the physical difficulty of journeying between continents and the possibility of discovering places that had been untouched by the philosophy of the late industrial age all fed the imagination of the literary elite.¹ Mario Praz, himself a correspondent in the 1920s and 1930s, made a similar point in the opening pages of his collection, *Il mondo che ho visto* [The world that I have seen] (1982). He suggested that the growth of mass tourism in the decades after the war undermined the very purpose of travel writing: the vicarious experience that it offered could no longer exert the same pull in a world where journeys to faraway places had become economically possible for the majority (1982: 14). Whether or not such nostalgia for the 'final age of travel' (Fussell 1980: vii) was justified, it is certainly true that the travel writers of the interwar period felt little need to question the validity of the activity in which they were engaged or to worry about the market for which their work was destined. Used to delivering a vision of another country to as large a reading public as possible, they were accustomed to acting as a filter between another culture and their own. Like most European observers, Italian writers made the confident assumption that they could deliver a vision of the 'soul' of the country they visited to readers whose only access to the place would be through their prose. Most of the prominent travel writers of the period produced a steady stream of books narrating journeys to one exotic destination after another. Between the end of the First World War and his death in 1938, for example, Arnaldo Cipolla wrote travel books on India (1922), South

America (1929), Africa (1930) and a string of other destinations. In roughly the same period, Cesco Tomaselli, published books on Japan (1935), China and Russia (1936), as well as describing his voyage to the Antarctic aboard an Anglo-Norwegian whaler (1938).

In this chapter I would like to isolate and examine two works that rank among the most interesting narrated journeys to distant locations, Mario Appeli's *India* (1925) and Emilio Cecchi's *Messico* (1932). Both texts were written by renowned travel writers whose books sold to a large audience (see below). Both texts were explorations of countries that, for different reasons, were the object of considerable attention. Symbolic of the success of British imperialism and the material benefits that could supposedly flow from it, India was looked upon by many Italians in the interwar years with a fair amount of envy, while Gandhi's challenge to British authority intensified interest in the country. If India was on the verge of a revolution, then Mexico was suffering the aftershocks of the huge political upheaval, and many observers were drawn to witness first hand the slow process of re-orientation after the confusion and destruction of the civil war. Both texts addressed the question of colonialism, whether in the present or the distant past: they assessed the impact of British and Spanish rule on the indigenous cultures of the two countries and drew conclusions that were either directly or indirectly relevant to Italy's recently discovered role as a colonial power. Both texts were, to varying degrees, innovative pieces of writing that experimented with means of approaching and representing different cultures. Drawn by an explicit desire to experience extreme forms of devotion, Appeli explored India by looking at its many religions, while Cecchi examined Mexico through centuries of its artwork. Lastly, both texts were examples of a tradition of using travel as a means of furthering the exploration of psychological states. The two writers sought to involve their reader in the drama of their responses to the sights they saw, and it was this drama, more than the simple move from one place to another, that gave a strong sense of narrative progression to their work. Though they wrote about very different places, their texts developed a similar dynamic: the interest in the country, which motivated the journey and defined its various stages, gradually began to give way to greater insecurity as both writers attempted to assert a distinction between themselves and the reality in which they felt they were entangled. By looking at the stylistic devices of the two writers, the narration of their changing responses and the expression both of fascination and hostility, the chapter aims to analyse the degree of ambivalence that the two texts articulated and to explore some of its implications in the increasingly expansionist climate of the time.

Mario Appelius in India

Appelius travelled to India shortly after completing the narration of his travels from one end of Africa to the other.² Indeed, his journey to India began in Africa, as he set sail in late 1923 from Tamatave on the liner *Britannia* bound for Bombay. In the introduction to the work that was to emerge from his journey, he described his expectations as he drew nearer to the subcontinent: he wrote of a country that had always exerted a strong fascination on his imagination, with its dead civilizations, its fantastic monarchies, its bizarre mysticism and its frightening deities (1925: 14–15). He suggested that no matter how long a Western observer spent trying to understand its workings it would retain its apparent strangeness and unreality.³ He also wrote of his encounters with other Italians on the liner, expressing his dismay at the difficulties faced by his compatriots when trying to seek their fortune in British or French territories. He spent most of 1924 in India: in the early part of the year he travelled from Bombay to the south-west of the country; in the spring and summer he moved from the holy city of Madurai up through south-eastern India before travelling onwards to Calcutta and north to Darjeeling, making a brief excursion into Tibet; in the autumn he visited Benares on his way to western India before returning to Calcutta at the end of the year.⁴ During the course of his journey he published a series of articles for *Il Popolo d'Italia*, while his collected impressions appeared in 1925 with the simple title, *India*.⁵ Over 500 pages long with 30 illustrations, the book set out to provide a comprehensive account of life in the major urban centres as well as a number of outlying provinces of the country. But, as was already clear from his opening comments on the fascination of Hindu mysticism and from the bitterness of his Anglophobic reflections, his two major concerns were the nature of India's largest religion and the solidity or otherwise of the British Empire.

Appelius' narration of his travels through India was in many ways like the record of a pilgrimage: he visited a succession of famous holy sites and was present at a number of imposing religious festivals. In Bombay he described the beliefs of the Parsi community and, visiting the Towers of Silence, reflected in gruesome detail on the uniqueness of their funerary rites (1925: 34–36); in Agra and Hyderabad, he admired the symmetry and monumentality of Islamic architecture and insisted on the contrast between the prevailing atmosphere of Muslim and Hindu India (198–99, 353–54); narrating his journey to Tibet (311–26), he wrote at length on the origin and development of Buddhism.⁶ But he repeated his assertion that the 'real India began and ended in Bramha' (233, 243) and most of his attention was absorbed by describing the signs of observance to the faith or attempting to explain its underlying philosophy. He contended that a Western observer

could begin to understand Hinduism if due account were taken of faith in the omnipotence of ritual; a cult of tradition that was responsible for orienting the mind obstinately towards the past; and an ingenuous but nevertheless extremely strong animism that translated into a terror of arcane forces (431). Claiming that his work was unencumbered by erudition, he portrayed Hinduism by registering his impressions of places, situations and people (487). He sustained a sense of narrative progression by charting an increasing engagement with a feeling of the sacred and by suggesting that the religion exerted a powerful grasp over its adherents by playing upon their most elementary fears. This interpretation was strong in his description of the Kailasanatha temple in Ellora (49–54), which he visited in January 1924, and the Minakshi complex in Madurai (85–93), which he saw in March of the same year.



Figure 2.1. Temple of Minakshi, Madurai (Fraccaroli 1931: 16). Reprinted with the permission of Garzanti Libri S.p.A.

He described the complex at Ellora as more impressive than the Colosseum or the pyramids of Egypt and as offering a ‘fantastic vision of the Orient’ (1925: 49). He reserved an even higher level of praise for the temple in Madurai: the most commanding religious building of Brahmanic India, the highest expression of one of the three great faiths of the world, the site in which one could feel the soul of Asia and sense the influence that the religion had exerted over 30 centuries of history [Figure 2.1]. But the expression of wonder was closely associated with the intimation of unease. As he moved further into what he defined as the subterranean cathedral at Ellora or towards the sanctums of Shiva and his consort Minakshi in Madurai, he became increasingly tempted to read the symbols of the Hindu shrines with a uniquely Western frame of reference and to translate the sacred images into the figurations of a gothic fantasy. In the darkness at Ellora, he wrote of being surrounded and menaced by the presence of a whole world of deities, dragons and symbolic animals (52–53). In Madurai he experienced a feeling of claustrophobia and menace, and in both spaces he wrote of his imagination being excited to such a degree that it populated the cavernous halls of the temples with lugubrious apparitions and the trace of dark happenings from the past. The intensity of the atmosphere and the prolonged contemplation of the visual representation of Hindu mythology had the effect of undermining basic intellectual functions and habitual ways of seeing. Concluding his description of the temple of Minakshi, he wrote:

Tutto finisce col mettervi fuori del vostro modo abituale di vedere, di pensare, perfino d’immaginare, collo sbalestravi in un mondo soprannaturale che è contro la vostra stessa natura, in un ambiente d’allucinazione nel quale anche le massime astrazioni dello spirito, la divinità, la fede, la morte, anche le supreme aspirazioni dell’anima ... assumono aspetti e parvenze diverse da quelle che il nostro cervello sa e può concepire. (1925: 88)

[Everything has the effect of taking you out of your habitual way of seeing, thinking, even of imagining, by sending you abruptly into a supernatural world that is against your nature, into an area of hallucinations in which the greatest spiritual abstractions – divinity, faith, death – even the supreme aspirations of the soul ... assume an appearance that is different from that which our brain knows and is able to conceive.]

Despite the emphasis on the supernatural, it was not the presence in some of the most holy sites of Hinduism that provoked the greatest disturbance in the writer so much as the witnessing of mass demonstrations of worship. Shortly after his description of the temple complex in Madurai, he recounted the sight, in March 1924, of a procession in honour of Vishnu (95–104). He was first of all astonished by the numbers of the faithful who gathered to pay homage to the god: he estimated that over 500,000 people had assembled in the plain surrounding the town and suggested that the size of the crowd was so vast

and its power so total that, if its energies were to be harnessed for the nationalist cause, it could overturn British rule in a matter of days. But it was not so much the enormity of the crowd that he found imposing as the stages of its reactions as the procession gradually reached its climax. He wrote of the growing sense of anticipation as the holy chanting that emanated from the temple of Minakshi intensified and as throngs of pilgrims continued to pour into the town. He speculated on the desires that moved the devotees and on their faith in the power of the divine to alleviate their afflictions. He represented the order of the effigies of the major deities who would be carried through the city and he described the air being saturated with the dust thrown up by the crowd as it waited in the full glare of the sun. He noted the excitement as the procession, guided by elaborately decorated elephants, music players and priests started on its route.

In the work of Roger Caillois, the festival is the moment when the experience of the sacred reaches its highest degree of intensity: in violently disrupting the ordinary routine of life and in agitating the souls of believers, it transposes the individual into an area of emotive experience where he or she feels transformed by elemental powers that exceed knowledge or comprehension (1959: 98–99). Losing an habitual or superficial sense of self, the individual is lost in a ‘whirlpool in which a frenzied multitude nosily affirms its oneness and indivisibility’ (1959: 164).⁷ Appellius recorded an engagement with the sacred that conformed more or less to this definition: his attention was shaken by the mass exultation at the appearance of the golden image of Vishnu, the ‘god of death and suffering’; he observed the transition of the crowd of believers from a state of ordinary behaviour to one of collective effervescence; his prose conveyed a sense of extreme agitation and even obsession. The sound of the ritual incantation ‘Samāiah Visnù!’ (sic), echoed simultaneously by tens of thousands of worshipers, seemed like the eruption of a ‘torrent of insanity’ (1925: 98); the procession of ‘colossal statues’ and ‘mysterious simulacra’ (101) like some enormous and nightmarish carnival; the deafening music accompanying the procession like a ‘pandemonium’ of ‘barbarous orchestras’ (99). Throughout this accumulation of impressions, the author repeated his sense of awe at the mass behaviour of the crowd in its adoration of the image of Vishnu, at one moment imploring favours of the god, at another falling prostrate before the image of the deity.

Seeking to convey to his readers what he saw as the essential qualities of Hinduism, Appellius inevitably made a number of comparisons with figures, practices and places of Catholicism: the widespread regard for animal life that he saw brought to mind the lesson of Saint Francis of Assisi; he defined the temple complex in Madurai as the Saint Peter’s of

the subcontinent; and he described Benares, which he visited towards the end of his journey, as an Asiatic equivalent of Lourdes. But, while the Catholic Church represented for him the touchstone of normality, the defining note of the Hindu faith was not so much its all pervasiveness as its extremity. The conclusion to which much of his writing tended was that the majority of Indians lived in an environment where every object and living creature was so invested with a sense of the divine that the material world had more or less disappeared (430). His tour of Benares [Figure 2.2] not only challenged a distinction between the physical and the metaphysical, but other Western forms of categorization. In keeping with the style that he used in many of his other travel books, his writing on the holy city portrayed one apparently chaotic scene after another. His roving curiosity moved from the water of the Ganges, to the spectacle of men and women bathing, to the ghats on which the cremation ceremonies took place. He evoked what he saw as a bizarre and eclectic accumulation of architectural styles and an environment where decadence and disease

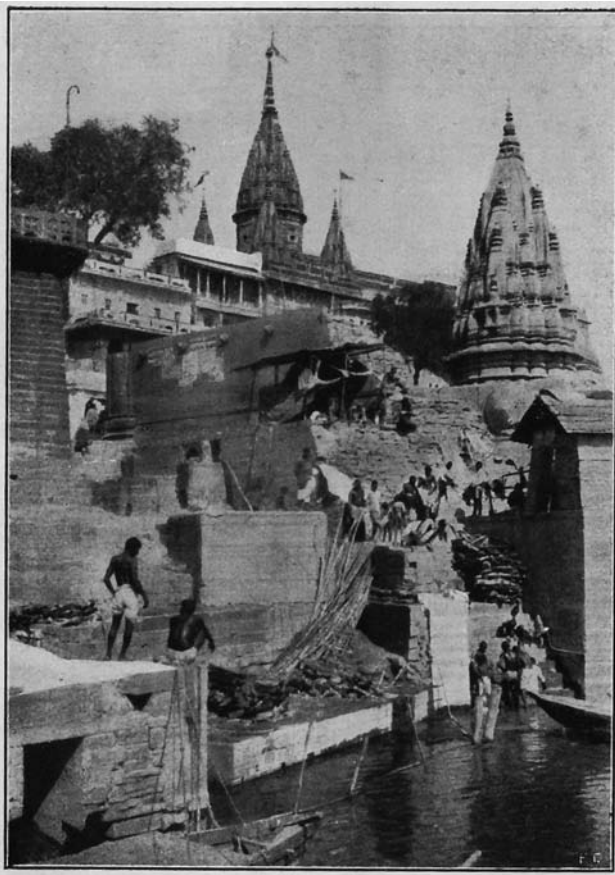


Figure 2.2. View of Benares (Fraccaroli 1931: 96). Reprinted with the permission of Garzanti Libri S.p.A.

were threaded into almost every sight.⁸ Above all, his evocation of the most holy site of Hindu India relied on the same pathologizing language as his description of Madurai. On his arrival in the city, he wrote of having set foot in a place where human anxiety and fanaticism assumed 'catastrophic proportions' (326).

The tendency of the author to write about religion in terms of madness and obsession was exacerbated by his habit of seeing the phenomena that he described from without. Though he occasionally referred to the Indian guide who accompanied him on his journey, he rarely recorded conversations with figures who could demystify some of his impressions. Only when he returned to Calcutta at the end of his journey did he try to understand more of Hindu philosophy by seeking an audience with four Brahman priests (429–38). When exposed to the expression of ideas concerning the illusory status of human ambition and the search for the dissolution of consciousness within the totality of creation, his response was to assert a feeling of his own identity and to claim that such ideas stood behind what he saw as the millennial stasis of Indian culture. The same sense of incomprehension had predominated when, narrating an evening visit to the shores of the Hooghly river west of Calcutta, he contemplated Hindu attitudes towards death (239–48). Looking at the cremation ghats, he had felt assailed by the impression of the seeing the India of 3,000 years ago.⁹ But the vision of Hinduism that his work offered was not one of the observance of a coherent philosophy, it was more the picture of a myriad of frequently contradictory beliefs and practices. In an attempt to suggest a tremendous diversity of forms of worship and theological interpretation, the narration of his encounter with Brahman asceticism was immediately followed by an account (438–43) of the celebration of carnal love that he claimed to have witnessed on the same evening.

The account was framed in the same manner as a piece of erotic fiction: late at night in Calcutta, he narrated being taken by his Indian guide to a small room from which, hidden to those in the adjoining space, he could observe a ceremony of worshippers of the Hindu god of love, Kama. He informed his reader of the periodic encounters of the devotees of the sect and their belief that through sexual ritual they could transform themselves into incarnations of Shiva and Kali. Throughout his description of the ceremony, he emphasized a feeling of disgust: he professed to find the sexual realism of the statues adorning the room into which he looked as 'brutal and primitive'; he was 'nauseated' by what he regarded as the profanation of the divine; he defined the spectacle of the 'Asian orgy' as one of 'revolting barbarity'.¹⁰ The narration concluded with the description:

Una baiadera danza fra le carcasse dei polli ed i teschi scarnati dei capretti, unta di grascie ... una coscia impiatrata di riso appiccicato e colaticcio ... Un'altra ha scambiato un piccolo mobile per Siva, lo abbraccia, lo stringe con furore d'epilettica ... Corpi umani giacciono in terra, corpi umani sono appoggiati come marionette contro le pareti, corpi umani sanguinano per morsi e ferite. (443)

[A dancer moves among the chicken carcasses and goats' skulls, oily with grease ... and with one of her thighs covered with a sticky mess of rice ... Another dancer has mistaken a small piece of furniture for the Shiva and she embraces it with epileptic fury ... Human bodies lie on the ground, human bodies are propped up on the walls like dolls, human bodies are bleeding through biting and wounding.]

More significant than Appelius' frequent – and, given the nature of his curiosity, duplicitous – expression of outrage was the interpretation of the Indian psyche which the evocation of the ritual gave rise to. Though the discussion of *Kama sutra* formed part of a larger discourse on Brahmanism, the argument moved from the theological to the racial as he attempted to find a biological explanation for the spectacle that he witnessed. It was his assertion that the whole of the indigenous population of India was vitiated by a profound and hereditary form of neurosyphilis, possibly the result of the long distant and 'mysterious cross-breeding' between Asiatic peoples (441–42).¹¹ This inherited cerebral affliction led, he argued, to a temperament that was 'turbid, abnormal and extremely excitable', capable on the one hand of sublime expressions of spirituality but on the other of descending into 'primitive baseness' (442). According to this theory, the examples of splendour and excess that he had witnessed on his journey through India all sprang from an underlying racial decadence. The sense of bewilderment or incomprehension that he had frequently registered when attempting to consider the manifestations of the 'Indian soul' suggested not simply a tremendous cultural divide but a consciousness that lay beyond any possibility of comprehension by European intelligence.¹²

It is doubtful that Appelius did in fact witness the scene of worship through sexual excess that he claimed merely to describe. It is probable that the account owed its origins to an imaginative interpretation of stories that he may have read or been told. Whether his writing was based on observation or not, his explanation of the reality of life in India clearly drew elements from fiction in its creation of a sense of the exotic, the macabre and the sexually alluring. The very dynamic of his book, with its gradual movement towards the strange or the incomprehensible and its accumulation of grand climactic scenes, mimicked the structure of narrative fiction. The select use of the imagination in the interests of creating an enthralling picture was not unique to Appelius. Following an itinerary that bore a close resemblance to the one that he pursued, Cipolla

(1925) and Fraccaroli (1931) both displayed the same tendency.¹³ Fraccaroli, in particular, translated the observation of religious devotion into a series of nightmarish episodes: in Benares he described his impression of a 'grandiose fanaticism' weighing upon the crowd and of the atmosphere being shaken by 'waves of an obscure madness' (1931: 127). Narrating his visit to the temple of Minakshi in Madurai, he conveyed the sense of a boundary between waking consciousness and dream being broken by the unexpected animation of statues in the flickering light of candles, in the maze-like structure of the temple and in the persistent confusion between silent groups of penitents, figurations of deities and the unseen presence of the temple's sanctified animals (1931: 41–52). Like Appelius, he came close to admitting sexual desire as the occasional motivation for his curiosity. In one chapter of his travelogue, he narrated his search from Madras to Benares, Delhi, Bombay and Calcutta for a glimpse of the sacred dancers of Hindu India, 'the perfume of the Orient, the malicious charm of Asia' (1931: 217).

The work of Appelius, like that of Cipolla and Fraccaroli, clearly referred to and remained within the conceptual limitations of a pre-existing series of European ideas and representations of the East. Appelius praised what he regarded as the accuracy of the depiction of India in the 'immortal pages' of Rudyard Kipling, Pierre Loti and André Chevrillon (1925: 233–34), while his writing on the religious festivals that he witnessed owed a clear but unacknowledged debt to Carlo Cattaneo's interpretation of Indian society as being in the grip of the fierce dictates of an established religion entirely hostile to progress.¹⁴ But his text did not seek to offer only a picture of Hindu India, it also set out to provide a picture of the British Raj in the final years of its existence. At every stage in his itinerary, he was surrounded by evidence of the presence of British influence, and on occasions he relied on the goodwill of minor or high-ranking officials to supply either information about, or safe passage to, certain parts of India. On his visit to Golconda Fort in Andhra Pradesh, for example, he was the guest of the British garrison (208).¹⁵ He pointed to the visible achievements of British rule from the implementation of administrative and financial systems to the development of heavy industry and networks of communication. He marvelled at how a country of such vastness and with a population that he estimated around 300 million, could remain under the control of a British colonial community which numbered only some 700,000 (20, 363).¹⁶

Yet, accompanying statements of admiration for the obvious territorial extent and durability of the imperial achievement, he articulated a hostile critique of British rule. He was keen to impress upon his readership what he regarded as the superficiality of Western influence over India. He

pointed to what he saw as the exploitation of deep divisions between rival religious or ethnic groups, to the bribery or flattery of local figures of authority as well as to the exploitation of the country's riches (19–21). He described British sovereignty as merely 'a simple superstructure' made up of the 'wings and scenery' of a stage (233).¹⁷ His claim that the nature of the Raj was ostentatious but shallow was substantiated by the reiteration that despite the duration of their presence, the British had failed to understand or in any sense to penetrate the depth of religious feeling in India let alone to form some kind of Anglo-Indian consciousness beyond isolated pockets in Bombay, Madras or Calcutta.¹⁸ Though defining Britain as Italy's ally, Cipolla had argued that the whole of India, with the sole exception of the Parsi community in Bombay, nourished a profound hatred for Britain and that the continuation of colonial rule was uniquely dependent on the efficiency of the army (265–66). Appellius formulated a judgement on what he considered the 'psychological isolation' of the British and their inability to perceive the inner workings of the people they governed. He continued:

Anche qui, come in Egitto, come in Mesopotamia, come nello Zanzibar, sono i *britishs*, i padroni, i grandi feudatarii della gleba colorata, chiusi nella loro sprezzante alterigia di casta inglese, solamente soldati, funzionarii e mercanti, solamente agenti d'una dominazione, mai apostoli d'un'idea, propagandisti d'una cordiale intesa, missionari d'una religione politica. (185)

[Here too, as in Egypt, Mesopotamia and Zanzibar, they are the Britishs [sic], the people in charge, the great feudal lords of the coloured masses; enclosed within the contemptuous haughtiness of the English caste, they are only soldiers, bureaucrats and merchants, only agents of domination, never are they apostles of an idea, disseminators of a cordial understanding, missionaries of a political religion.]

Such a sweeping condemnation showed little interest in the functioning of imperial strategies at a local level and made no allowance for the intricate layering of relations between the agents of British colonial authority and its subjects. But, while he may have lacked the detailed knowledge of India to make anything more than impressionistic statements on the mechanics of British sovereignty, he was well placed to witness the rising tide of opposition to British rule. Cipolla had travelled to India three years after the massacre of Jallianwala Bagh and two years after Gandhi had launched the non-cooperation movement, and had contended that unrest in India had the potential to deliver a mortal blow to British imperialism (263–64).¹⁹ Travelling from one part of India to another, Appellius showed a keenness for witnessing what he consistently referred to as the 'revolution' at first hand. In June 1924 he was in Calcutta shortly after the murder of several Sikhs in the city's docks (215–23). Describing the silent demonstrations of Gandhi's supporters, the nationalist suspicion that the

British were to blame for the incident and the climate of fear and paralysis in the city, he suggested that the moment he witnessed was unique for sensing the undercurrents of feeling in India.

More significantly, he recorded an interview with Gandhi, whom he met in Calcutta in July 1924 (249–59). From the details that he supplied, it is clear that the encounter was fairly brief and that Gandhi was willing to speak about a range of topics but only in very general terms. He spoke about having visited Italy in the past, about his forthcoming journey to Europe and his hope of meeting old friends there; he described his loss of faith in support for reform coming from the British; he exposed his concept of non-violent resistance (*satyagraha*) and reflected on the brutality of General Dyer's killing of unarmed protesters in 1919. Such observations were repeated to a steady stream of foreign journalists – Appelius wrote of waiting his turn for an audience – and are largely unsurprising. The interest of the interview is to be found more in the opportunity that it afforded its writer for expounding his view of the modern, Messianic leader. Throughout the record of his conversation with Gandhi, Appelius insisted on a comparison with Mussolini and Lenin. In his delineation of the three leaders, each was described as having risen to prominence owing to the carnage and suffering of war; each was credited with having indicated the means of salvation to his people; and each was portrayed as having both inspired and defined a revolution. But above all, all three were in his estimation the founders of a religion: Mussolini's cult of the nation was analogous to Lenin's creed of equality which in turn was mirrored by Gandhi's faith in humanity (259). The image of Gandhi as the apostolic voice of a new religion was confirmed by citing the belief held by some that he was either the incarnation of Buddha or the personification of Vishnu and by comparisons between his actions and scenes from the *New Testament* (the concept of *satyagraha* was explained by reference to the Sermon on the Mount).

For Appelius, the religious power of the trinity of modern leaders did not derive from a privileged connection with a transcendental notion of the divine but from an ability to interpret the will of the masses, to see through the crowd the spirit of the nation and to guide intuitively 'the mysterious tendencies of the race' (250). After the death of Lenin in 1924, he claimed that only Mussolini could rival Gandhi's facility for attracting vast crowds of adherents, and he contended that the similarity between the two went further: both were drawn towards socialism in their youth; both admired Britain before becoming aware of the need to challenge its political domination; both were leading the struggle to recreate their respective nations. Though defining Mussolini as the '*Duce* of a modern people' and Gandhi as 'the leader of an Asian multitude' (252), he saw elements of

Fascist thinking reflected in the movement for Indian independence, insisting on an affinity in the philosophy of both leaders concerning the duty of individual sacrifice, the relation between capital and labour, and between the state and its citizens (252). The interview was first published in *Il Popolo d'Italia* on 3 August 1924 and it provided readers of the newspaper with a Gandhi whose magnetism and whose feeling for the 'spirit' of his nation could readily be understood by any follower of Mussolini. Yet, as Sposito has noted (2002: 123) there was something heavily ironic in making so strong an analogy between one political figure whose rise to power had been dependent on violence and another whose whole philosophy was predicated on non-violent resistance. In the same year that Gandhi, through the medium of the interview, spoke at length about *satyagraha* to the readers of *Il Popolo d'Italia*, Matteotti was abducted and killed.

Appelius' journey to meet Gandhi was an important part of his book on India; it was there that he gave his assessment both of the country's recent past and its probable future. His positive portrayal of Gandhi was not entirely unorthodox. De Felice's analysis of Fascist Italy's relations with the East (1988) argues that until the approach of the Second World War no clear policy towards the movement for Indian independence predominated, with leading political figures and journalists prepared to make conflicting judgements of Gandhi and his importance. For Cipolla, the Indian leader was simply an 'agitator' and a fanatic, a figure who had infiltrated the imagination of the masses and who was intent on destroying all the benefits of British rule and on making India a copy of Communist Russia (1925: 159–63).²⁰ In his history of relations between East and West, by contrast, Giuseppe De Lorenzo compared him with Mazzini (1931: 14–17) and, quoting at length from E.B. Havell's *Short History of India* (1924) and Walter Roper Lawrence's *The India We Served* (1928), made the controversial claim that an influential section of the British population was favourable to Indian independence in the same way that a century earlier public opinion in Britain had supported the *Risorgimento* (1931: 35–38). Shortly after Gandhi's visit to Rome in December 1931, *Il Giornale d'Italia* was happy to publish his interview with Virginio Gayda, while in a speech made in early 1929, Arnaldo Mussolini described him as 'the prophet of hundreds of millions of Indians oppressed by the British' (De Felice 1988: 190).²¹

Emilio Cecchi in Mexico

In the mid to late 1920s India had been the destination of a number of important travel writers but the same was also true of Mexico. Arnaldo

Cipolla stayed in the country between May and July 1926. Using the capital as his base, he made excursions to Puebla, to Guadalajara in the west as well as to Vera Cruz and Tampico on the eastern shoreline. The book to emerge from his experiences, *Montezuma contro Cristo* (1927), concentrated, as its title suggested, on an interpretation of the struggle between the post-revolutionary governments (in particular the Calles administration) and the Catholic Church.²² The work argued that the anti-clericalism of the Mexican State was an inevitable consequence of a form of nationalism that, inspired by socialism, expressed its inward-looking nature by taking measures against foreign capital and by making a show of valorizing Mexico's indigenous culture. Cipolla referred to the prohibition on taking photographs that displayed inhabitants of outlying areas of the country in a negative light (1927: 12) and to the elevation of the image of the last Aztec emperor to the status of figure head (28). He saw the persecution of the clergy as testimony to the failure of Spanish colonialism and to the loss of supremacy of the 'white race' (12–13). Notwithstanding the nature of his delineation of 'Aztec nationalism' (12), he suggested that the Spanish conquest, the mass conversion to Catholicism and successive waves of political upheaval had had little effect in changing the basic 'immobility' (92) of Mexico's Indian population. Two years later, Appelius began a journey through the country shortly before the assassination of the newly re-elected President Álvaro Obregón in July 1928. His journey took him to the major centres of the country as well as to the state of Campeche and the Yucatan peninsula.²³ His text sought to provide a lengthy explanation for the continuing revolutionary strife, and his description of the country was generally less hostile than that of Cipolla. True to his Anglophobic principles, he saw Mexico as a frontier against the expansion of Anglo-Saxon influence and he claimed that the whole of the country's population tended towards 'Latin civilization' (1929: 355–57).

The most complex picture of the history and culture of Mexico was, however, offered by Emilio Cecchi. When he travelled through Mexico, he did so as a sophisticated and highly regarded essayist. His prominence as an art historian, a literary critic and essayist meant that by the end of the 1920s he was often invited to speak on topics of cultural interest at learned institutions. His publications on Renaissance painting and on Anglo-American culture had earned him a reputation beyond the confines of Italy, and from 1930 to 1931 he enjoyed the position of visiting lecturer in History of Art at Berkeley. In late 1930, making the most of his stay, he journeyed down to Mexico. He travelled first through southern California, spending a few days in Hollywood, where his connections with the world of cinema gave him the opportunity of

meeting Buster Keaton, George Arliss and Gloria Swanson, as well as reflecting on the transition from silent to sound films. He then travelled through the Yosemite National Park and the Merced valley where he witnessed the spectral atmosphere of the deserted villages and the discarded remnants of mining machinery of the years of the gold-rush. He then moved on to the wilderness of Arizona and New Mexico to see the reservations of the Hopi and the Navajo.²⁴ Arriving in Mexico in early 1931 he passed through Zacatecas and on to Mexico City from where he made excursions to Xochimilco, Cuernavaca and the ancient city of Teotihuacán, before returning, via Queretaro and El Paso, to California in March 1931. Both during the course of his journey and after his return he sent a series of dispatches to the *Corriere della Sera* and these were published throughout 1931 under the rubric 'Lettere dal Messico'. A year later, the series of impressions, together with 33 photographs taken by the author, were published in book form with the title of *Messico*.²⁵

In comparison with the journeys of both Cipolla and Appellius, Cecchi spent a relatively brief period of time in Mexico, and his writings on the country did not document the after-effects of the Revolution in the same detail. Yet, while the observation of the earlier texts was largely unmediated by reference to other sources, part of the greater sophistication of *Messico* derived from its author's awareness of the relation between the impressions that he formed during his journey and those recorded by other travellers in different epochs to the same places. In the preface he referred to the essay, 'Gli antichi messicani' [The Ancient Mexicans] by the humanist scholar and political thinker of the Italian Risorgimento, Carlo Cattaneo. The essay appeared in the wake of the scholarly interest in the Aztec civilization aroused by the strangely delayed publication of Fra Bernardino Ribeira de Sahagún's *Historia general de las cosas de Nueva Espana* (1830) and was itself a re-reading of the impressions of the Spanish chroniclers.²⁶ Thus, in visiting Mexico and in seeking out the surviving signs of the Aztecs, Cecchi was paying homage to a place of awe and terror that he had already constructed in his imagination. Aside from the influence of Cattaneo, he was also far more alive to the suggestions of a range of American and European writers than either Appellius or Cipolla. His interpretation of the significance of the Revolution was most conspicuously informed by the conclusions of Ernest Gruening's magisterial study, *Mexico and its Heritage* (1928). Though Cecchi was critical of D.H. Lawrence's two works, *The Plumed Serpent* (1926) and *Mornings in Mexico* (1927), it is clear that they played a part in defining both his itinerary and some of his responses.²⁷ On his way through New Mexico he made an excursion to the house of

the poet Witter Bynner in Santa Fé, who had accompanied Lawrence on his first trip to Mexico, where Cecchi saw a collection of the English writer's drawings on the sacred dances of the Hopi.²⁸ In Mexico City, while trying to organize his thoughts on seeing a bull fight (1932: 72–75), he deferred to the opening description of *The Plumed Serpent*.

Despite the various influences on the text, *Messico* displayed a distinctive use of language – a highly literary style peppered with Tuscan colloquialisms – and a particular mode of approaching the reality of modern Mexico. Unlike Appelius and Cipolla, who had sought to assess the impact of the policies pursued under the presidencies of Obregón and Calles in the wake of the Revolution, Cecchi rarely expressed himself directly on issues of political significance. He preferred, instead, to examine the upheavals of the country's past as they were refracted through one art form or another. On his arrival in Mexico City [Figure 2.3] he made a series of excursions to see the most important examples of the capital's art and architecture as well as considering some non-visual forms of artistic expression. Travelling to the sites of the capital, he sought to relate the different strata of Mexico's cultural history to one another. His journey took him through what he referred to as the three 'essential factors of life in Mexico': the militarism of the post-revolutionary administrations, the country's particular brand of Catholicism and its indigenous heritage (1932: 82). The journey led him indirectly to the question of religious persecution, the influence of pre-Columbian religions on Catholicism and the character of the Revolution. What made the work a compelling evocation of the place was not so much the originality of the idea of seeing a country through centuries of its artwork as the degree of introspection that accompanied the inquiry.

Two modern forms of expression that were the object of his sustained attention were the ballads and songs (*corridos*) sung both during and after the protracted revolutionary struggle, and the publicly sponsored work of the Mexican muralists.²⁹ Through the exploration of the history and mode of transmission of the *corridos*, he presented the famous figures of the Revolution as they lived in the popular imagination: Emiliano Zapata, full of resounding promises and daring deeds that came to little; Venustiano Carranza, the perpetrator of many mistakes but the object of lasting affection; Pancho Villa, betrayed and dead at the wheel of his car. If he appreciated the power of the *corridos* to deliver succinct narrative judgements on the protagonists of the nation's history as well as their facility in communicating deep-rooted elements of the Mexican psyche,³⁰ he was less sensitive to the monumental fresco painting of Diego Rivera. His characterization of the artist, described as the child of the Revolution and its artistic consciousness, was almost entirely hostile.



Figure 2.3. Piazza della Costituzione, Mexico City (Cecchi, 1932: photo 12). Reprinted with the permission of Suso Cecchi d'Amico.

During his stay at Berkeley, he remembered seeing Rivera arrive with Frida Kahlo in San Francisco to paint a series of murals in the city's Stock Exchange, and he pointed to what he saw as the hypocrisy of a 'paladin of communism' (1932: 106) coming to adorn the 'triclinium of foreign plutocrats' (107). The slighting definition of the man was compounded by the description of the cycle of frescoes on Mexico's history in the Palacio de Cortés in Cuernavaca, which, in his view, were merely a didactic exposition, lacking a compelling sense of drama. Identifying the propagandistic purpose behind Rivera's work as the glorification of the renewed power of the race (110), he claimed that his emblematic representations of Mexico's Indian population were conventional and expressionless. The claim was accompanied by the dismissal of the more innovative side of his national-popular art as 'false primitivism' (109).³¹

Underlying Cecchi's consideration of the work of the Mexican muralists and the popular songs of the Revolution, lay an interest in, but also an unease with, artistic manifestations that seemed to contradict his own notion of order or civilization and which seemed to draw their inspiration from the expression of extreme violence or of uncontrolled sexuality. One of the most famous of the *corridos*, 'Las tres pelonas', was in his words the 'barbarous fantasy' of Francisco Villa's superstitious and ferocious followers, while Rivera's collection of drawings displayed a discordant clash of styles and a furious tendency to deform reality (108). The conservatism of his critical judgements would later play a part in disseminating an idea of the United States as a place of terrifying disorder (see Chapter Seven), while the dominant sensation he experienced in Mexico, implied through patterns of reflection and association embedded within the language of his book, was one of disquiet. Though ostensibly a random collection of impressions, *Messico* obeyed a strong narrative structure defined by a movement towards a reality that was ever more confounding. On returning from a variety show in one of Mexico City's theatres, he registered the impression of night seeming darker than in any other place and invested with 'a suspended sense of alarm, something gruesome' (70). Walking down the city's central avenue, the Paseo de la Reforma, and seeing the arena in which a bullfight was due to take place, he reflected that a newer form of cruelty was to be added to the ancient blood-lust that pervaded the locality (71). He was struck not merely by the atmosphere of impending brutality but, on an excursion to the floating gardens of Xochimilco, by what he saw as the diseased aspect of the locality and by an insidious smell of decay.

The feeling of uncertainty mingled with a latent sense of dread was recorded by many European visitors to Mexico in the interwar years.³²

Though the intentions behind D.H. Lawrence's journeys to Mexico in the early 1920s were entirely different from those of Cecchi and though his fictional writing imagined an apocalyptic resurgence of pre-Colombian belief and a possible fusion of Indian and European consciousness, there are surprising points of coincidence between Cecchi's perception of Mexico and the place as it was seen through the eyes of the main protagonist of *The Plumed Serpent*, Kate Leslie, at least in the early chapters of the novel. The overriding impression of the capital city as it is relayed through the voice of Lawrence's character is of a place that is both oppressive and gruesome, with an 'under-drift of squalor and reptile-like evil' (1990: 60). Much of the early part of Lawrence's Mexican novel reads like a travelogue, with its account of a bull-fight in the central arena, of a trip to see Rivera's frescoes at the University and its lengthy descriptions of the awesome beauty of the landscape. But Lawrence's works on Mexico, whether fictional or referential, were not only concerned with the atmosphere attending to certain places, they were also characterized by the intensity of their inquiry into the subjectivity of the Indian population and its expression through external forms of behaviour.³³ In contrast, Cecchi looked at Mexico's indigenous population from a distance and deployed the same methods of observation that he used when examining cultural artefacts of recent or ancient provenance. The effect of this reifying mode of attention was, if anything, to accentuate his feeling of unease or intimidation.

On his arrival in the capital, he noted the gaudy architecture (imitative of French nineteenth-century styles) of the tree-lined avenues and he was quick to notice that the most refined goods available in Europe were on sale in the city's boutiques. But the impression of similarity quickly subsided as he observed the crowds of Mexican Indians moving through the centre of the city:

Sotto alla cupola dei capelli, i visi appaiono più scarniti ed aguzzi; le mascelle a triangolo come quelli dei gatti. Maschere dai lunghi baffi giapponesi. Facce mongole in una canizie di stoppa. Sull'attaccapanni delle spalle, a volte non è rimasto che un teschio con un po' di cartilagine unta. E le movenze di certi grandi vecchi ischeletriti rammentano il tentennante annaspere della scimmia-ragno. Sboccando dalle strade laterali, queste torme giungono dall'altro mondo. (66)

[Beneath their domed hats, their faces seem sharp and emaciated, their triangular jaws feline. Their faces are like Japanese masks with long moustaches. Mongol faces under a mass of white hair. Sometimes all that is left above a pair of rickety shoulders is a skull covered by a thin layer of greasy cartilage. The gait of some of the tall, skeletal older men makes you think of the oscillating movement of spider monkeys. Coming from the side streets, these crowds of people seem to appear from the other world.]

In this description, the accumulation of metaphor deprives the crowd of distinguishably human features: individual members of the group are compared with objects or relics in a museum, they are likened to exotic and domestic animals and their physical appearance suggests that they enter the writer's field of perception from another world. The sense of strangeness is accentuated by the arbitrary isolation or dislocation of selected details from the whole, and the transformation of such details into new elements. In *Montezuma contro Cristo*, Cipolla registered a similar sense of intimidation when surrounded by groups of the urban poor in the centre of the capital (1927: 98–99). His writings were, however, inflected by an unambiguous racism. In his view the country was inhabited by a decadent, 'bastard' race (1927: 219) that lacked any sense of volition and which was naturally inclined towards falsity and deception (1927: 101).

For Cecchi it was above all the recognition on the part of the observer of features of his own culture placed within another setting that he professed to find disconcerting. On another occasion his assumptions concerning a radical difference between himself and the people he saw were jolted by the sudden adoption of a Western mode of behaviour. When waiting on the steps of the church of San Francisco he recorded being accosted by an old woman of obvious Indian descent, whose desiccated and blackened face he likened to that of an Egyptian mummy. In his narration of the event, the woman asks him for a charitable donation, 'una limosnita', and thus assumes what he regards as a straightforward position of inferiority. However, when she receives the donation, she insists on shaking the hand of her benefactor in an earnest gesture of gratitude. The unexpectedness of the gesture, coupled with the fact that it is taken from the writer's own cultural language, upsets the positional hierarchy of the scene and establishes instead 'a relationship of dignity and human equality' (1932: 65). The Mexican Indian's mimicry of a refined act of European social communication provides the writer with a displaced representation of himself, which, because it serves to break down an accepted distance between observer and observed, exerts an effect that is not altogether reassuring. As Robert Young (1990: 147) has written: 'The familiar, transported to distant parts becomes uncannily transformed, the identity of that which is being represented, and the relation of power, if not altogether reversed, certainly begins to vacillate'.³⁴

Less impressionistic than his reflections on the inhabitants of Mexico City was Cecchi's consideration of the 'religious question' in Mexico. Though his journey occurred only a few years after the height of the armed struggle between the government and the Church over the latter's

refusal to accept state control of the numbers and the nationality of the priesthood, his interpretation of the situation was less sympathetic to the forces of Catholicism than that of other Italian observers.³⁵ While Cipolla interpreted the anti-clericalism of the Calles government (1924–28) as part of a rising tide of ‘Aztec nationalism’ that sought to reject the cultural heritage of Spanish rule, Cecchi maintained that the bitter and long-standing antagonism between Church and State did not concern the nature of religious observance but was motivated by the attitude and the actions of the ecclesiastical authorities.³⁶ Referring extensively to Gruening, he gave a brief history of the acquisitiveness and corruption that had marred the work of the Mexican clergy over centuries (1932: 101–3) and which had contributed to the adoption of only the externals of Christianity by the indigenous population despite the astonishing levels of conversion in the wake of the Spanish conquest. He also asserted that, when reading of the religious struggle in Mexico, Italian readers should attempt to imagine a *sui generis* and superficial form of Catholicism that had little or nothing to do with the European tradition of worship (101).³⁷ Summarizing the main points of Gruening’s lengthy study of the ‘Mexican religion’ (1928: 229–75) and quoting his statistical information verbatim, he reiterated the contention that though the overwhelming majority of Mexicans were nominally Catholic, the adherence of the Indian population masked a continuing paganism.³⁸ In support of this assertion he referred to some of the most frequently cited examples of adaptations of Christian theology and the persistence of pre-Colombian rituals: he noted the Indianization of the figure of Christ and of the Virgin Mary, for example, and the strength of the practice of laying out of food on family graves on the Day of the Dead.³⁹ As was the case concerning other aspects of life in Mexico, the most subtle exploration of the merging of belief systems sprang not from the theoretical consideration of the topic but from the analysis of religious artefacts.

The examination of Catholic art and architecture in *Messico* was extensive: the author commented as an art historian on the cathedral in the capital, he travelled to the shrine of the Virgin of Guadalupe and he visited the former seminary of Tepozotlan, writing an essay on the defining features of the Churringueresque style. In the seminary’s church, San Francisco Javier, he was overawed by the magnificence and intellectual refinement of what he defined as the baroque taken to an unknown level of extremity (1932: 122–27). Visiting a less well-known church on the outskirts of Xochimilco, he was seized by a more sinister sensation. Remembering the sight of a crucifix hanging on one of the walls of the church, he wrote:

Il torso è tutto virgolato di rosso. Sotto alla corona di spine vere, la capigliatura disciolta è fatta di capelli naturali: capelli recisi al cadavere di qualche donna, e ora bruttati di ragnatele e di polvere ... Ma anche più del sudiciume e delle piaghe, è orrenda l'espressione del volto. È orrenda quanto più assente, e oserei dire imbambolata, inebetita; come se l'artista abbia voluto rappresentare il Cristo che patisce nella carne dell'ultimo uomo, dell'infimo e più degradato *peone*. L'ha assistito l'implacabile, atavica vocazione messicana di celebrare la sofferenza senza luce e conforto. (80–81)

[The torso is splattered with red. Beneath the crown, made from real thorns, the untidy mop of hair is also real: the hair has no doubt been taken from the head of a woman's corpse and is now dirtied with cobwebs and dust. ... But even more than the dirt and the wounds, the expression of the face is horrible. It is horrible because it seems distracted, fixed, paralyzed. It is as though the artist had wanted to represent Christ's suffering in the flesh of the last man, the most lowly and degraded *peon*. In order to do so he was assisted by the implacable, atavistic vocation of the Mexicans to celebrate suffering without light or comfort.]

In looking at the iconic figure in the Mexican church, the observer cannot fail to recognize its similarity with Italian objects of worship, yet in the writing it is not the similarities but the differences that are the true object of his gaze: in every detail of the carved effigy, from the texture of the hair to the expression in the eyes, he discovers an unrelenting emphasis upon the physical effects of torture. Rather than merely minor representational alterations, the features that heighten the suffering of the figure of Christ serve to upset the process by which he would habitually attribute a signified to a given sign. His awareness of the grotesque and strikingly unfamiliar elements inscribed within a familiar symbol leads him to the unsettling perception that the icon, which would normally articulate with a redemptive Christian philosophy, has been appropriated by an alien culture and signifies the celebration of atrocious suffering and death. In the manifest indications of the Catholic religion, he detects the latent presence of the ancient death cult of the Aztecs. The change of the 'signified', discovered on close examination of the sign, has transformed an object of devotion and respect into a thing of horror. Shortly after his detailed description of the crucifix, he wrote:

E si pensa alle innumerevoli maschere di pietra che, al Museo Nazionale, non fanno che ripetere fino al disgusto sempre lo stesso motivo: la faccia d'un moribondo con gli occhi spalancati e la bocca che rantola. (81)

[You are reminded of the endless series of masks made from stone in the National Museum, which replicate *ad nauseam* the same motif: the face of someone who, eyes wide open and mouth rattling, is in the process of dying.]

While the narrator's response to the detection of the latent signs of the ancient religion involved a certain obvious repulsion, it also encompassed an ability on his part to recognize the disturbing similarities

between the foreign culture and his own. The highly ambivalent emotional experience that he documented and which formed the heart of his text can be explored further with reference to a Freudian notion of the uncanny. In his essay on the 'unheimlich', Freud begins to locate the significance of the term by examining its relation to the class of feeling designated by the oppositional concept of 'das heimlich', or the homely. If the homely means the familiar, friendly and reassuring, then its negation in broad terms means the unfamiliar, the strange and the alien. Yet, Freud does not place the two terms in antithesis: instead he sees the uncanny as being essentially connected with the homely. More specifically, his central proposition is that it is the conjunction of the familiar with the unfamiliar that gives rise to the experience of the uncanny. Such archetypal uncanny experiences as the perceived animation of the inanimate, the encounter in reality of what was thought to exist only in the imagination, or the perception of a dysfunction in the ordinary temporal order are explained by Freud as the recurrence of modes of thinking that were once familiar (they belonging to the prehistory of the individual or the community) but which have been rendered unfamiliar by the coming to prominence of rational thought or the acceptance of the reality principle. In his words, the uncanny is: 'Nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and something which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression' (1990: 363). Underlying this assertion is Freud's belief that every individual has passed through an early stage of psychical development characterized by the propensity to believe that thoughts are omnipotent and that objects, insufficiently distinguished from their observer, are themselves possessed of the power of thought. Freud maintains (363) that traces of this early phase of personal development are still capable of manifesting themselves and that: 'everything that now strikes us as uncanny fulfils the condition of touching those residues of animistic mental activity within us and of bringing them to expression' (363).

The life-size wooden crucifix that Cecchi discovers in the church causes a feeling of alarm or unease partly because it dislocates a familiar signifier from its signified and partly also because the extremity of the statue's realism is such that the observer is led to doubt whether the inanimate object might not possess its own form of animation – at one point the narrator observes that the figure appears to shake under the influence of a sudden gust of wind. The belief, or indeed the fear, that the inanimate may be animate forces Cecchi momentarily to experience an intellectual doubt as to whether pre-rational beliefs that have been discarded may not in fact contain a shocking element of truth. The object

of worship induces an overvaluation of the subject's belief in the power of his own mental processes, and a belief in the omnipotence of thoughts. The experiential ramifications of the 'atrocious' sight of the dying Christ represent a clear instance of the uncanny repetition of childhood fears in the intellectual life of adulthood, but there are many other such incidences in *Messico*. One interesting record of a strong ego disturbance occurs as the narrator enters the cemetery at Tepeyac. The narrator, walking through the alleys of the graveyard, notices the similarity between the Mexican funereal architecture and its European equivalent. The vagueness of the impression is, however, suddenly sharpened when, struck by a moment of involuntary repetition, he re-experiences an excursion made as a child to the Florentine church of San Miniato:

In una terra così truce ed aliena, mi ritrovai come quando, fanciullo, sulla gentile altura di San Miniato, in una visita al cimitero, staccatomi un tratto da chi mi accompagnava e rimasto misteriosamente solo, m'ero affacciato a un antro simile, con in fondo una bara e gli avanzi dei fiori putrefatti; e raccapricciando avevo sentito fiatarmi in volto l'alito cariato della morte.⁴⁰

[In such a gruesome and alien country, I found myself to be a boy again on the gentle incline of San Miniato, visiting the cemetery there. Separated suddenly from my guardian, and mysteriously prey to a sense of solitude, I had approached a similar funereal location, in which was to be found a coffin and the rotten remains of some flowers; turning away in horror, I had felt across my face a gust of death's decaying smell.]

The sudden over-accentuation of the psychical reality that is brought about by the strength of one sensory element seems both fateful and inescapable. But the imposition of a residual emotional state is disconcerting not only because of its involuntarily compelling nature but because of the alteration it entails in the relationship between the travel writer and his surroundings. The traveller wants to assert a difference between himself and the 'gruesome' and 'alienating' country which he is exploring, but the remarkable coincidence of sense impressions makes that distinction problematic. Instead of the intensely civilized world of Florence being set against the putatively more primitive reality of Mexico, an area of inter-changeability is *dis-covered* by the uncanny sense of repetition that the traveller experiences. The failure to juxtapose cultural situations leads to the implicit recognition that what the narrator uncovers in Mexico may simply be a different configuration of essentially the same reality.

The moments when the encounter with the culture of Mexico forces the traveller to experience surmounted modes of thought or perception are at their most intense when he comes into unmediated contact with the remnants of the Aztec culture. Such moments in turn reach their climax when Cecchi visits the pyramids of Teotihuacán, where, to use his words,

the face of the ancient Aztec people shows itself in its ‘most imperious essentialness’ (91) [Figure 2.4]. The travel writer makes no attempt to disguise the animosity he feels for the ancient religions of Central America, they being in his conscious opinion the very antithesis of his European belief-system. Before journeying to Teotihuacán he stopped at the National Museum in Mexico City and, reflecting on the morbid



Figure 2.4. Pyramid of Tenayucan, Mexico (Cecchi, 1939: photo 13). Reprinted with the permission of Suso Cecchi d'Amico.

attraction of the macabre, he spoke of the 'hateful religion' of the Aztecs. Drawing close to the exhibits of the museum, he produced the following record of his impressions:

Nella tetra mezzaluce delle vetrine, le 'maschere sacre' d'onice e ossidiana sembrano volti riflessi nelle sfaccettature d'un incubo; e sempre e sempre son volti di moribondi. Gli idoli dagli occhi argenti guardano con un'aria di malaugurio, come civette. Si conferma l'impressione che ... quest'arte non trovi altra musa che la ferocia e la morte: si sfoga a creare emblemi macabri. (90)

[In the dark half light of the showcases, the sacred masks of onyx and obsidian appear like faces reflected in the facets of a nightmare; always, without exception, the faces are those of the dying. The idols with their silver eyes are like owls who gaze with a malevolent stare. Seeing the masks, one's impression is confirmed that ... such art finds inspiration only in ferocity and death: it vents its fury by creating macabre emblems.]

What is perhaps most striking about the above extract is that it represents the surveying eye of the narrator being confronted with the returning gaze of the masks. The gaze of the macabre effigies is both compelling and menacing: like the apparition of the Mexican Christ it induces in the onlooker an uncertainty as to whether animistic beliefs have been overcome by rational thought or whether they may not, after all, be possible. Concomitantly, the narrator's subject position undergoes a series of enforced changes: from being merely an observer, he becomes a figure within a nightmare who sees the infinite repetition of the same malevolent face, he experiences a feeling of helplessness that is common to some dream-states and becomes like a child inhabiting a world of animated objects. The writing moves from being a piece of art criticism to become an intriguing piece of creative writing, showing the flexibility of the co-ordinates between which the writing moves. However, the purpose of religious effigies, as Levi-Strauss has written, is to impress upon the mind of the individual the traditions and the philosophy of the group. They ensure 'the transition from symbol to meaning, from magical to normal, from supernatural to social' (1993: 262). When Cecchi wrote on gazing at the exhibits behind the glass showcases in the National Museum, he recorded the impressions of a representative of twentieth-century European culture being brought face-to-face with the group philosophy of the Aztec civilization, hundreds of years after that civilization's demise. He wrote of feeling like the original, terrified addressee of the masks' gaze. In the same way that the visit to the cemetery of Tepeyac disrupted the narrating subject's idea of the temporal order of his own existence, then the viewing of the exhibits acted to effect a similar disjunction, only not with personal but with collective time. Cecchi spoke of the supernatural lure of the religious masks touching internal residues of pre-historical sentiment.

The impression of the apparent nearness of the Aztecs was strongest during the visit to Teotihuacán, the narration of which formed the structural and thematic climax of the book. In the description of the pyramids themselves and of the atmosphere that the writer suggested emanated from their locality, the prose of *Messico* betrayed its greatest similarity to that of Cattaneo's 'Gli antichi messicani'. In his essay, Cattaneo had drawn extensively on the descriptions contained in Sahagún's *Historia general de las cosas de Nueva Espana* and upon original reports of Cortés and Gama in order to produce a summary of the defining features of Aztec society. He gave a learned account of the Aztecs' system of agricultural production, of the advanced stages of architectural development which they had reached, as well as speaking of their methods of counting and of astrological observation. But the particular focus of his work had been on the centrality of religion in the organization of Aztec society and on the tyrannical but effective role played by the priesthood. In order to convey the extent of the hierocracy's power and the modalities of its operation, he had described in lurid detail the function of the terrifying effigies and the system of human sacrifices. In his evocations of the ritualistic killings, Cattaneo had insisted on the horror of the scene: he had imagined the last minutes of a sacrificial victim's life, depicted the frightful garments worn by the priests and, quoting from the reports of Spanish observers, he had evoked the horrific violence perpetrated against the individual for the supposed good of society and concluded that the human sacrifices provoked both pity and nausea. In his narration of his visit to the pyramids, Cecchi similarly endeavoured to see the site from the perspective of the victim and displayed an equally horrified pattern of response. He wrote of the location:

L'impressione riesce al massimo grado trista e ostile; e non soltanto ostile, ma nella sua intensità quasi inesplicabile. Sembra di trovarsi presenti e in qualche modo compartecipi, ad una realtà fondata su una ragione disumana e sovvertita; di aver a che fare, più o meno direttamente, col demonio ... Anche il demonio è collaboratore d'Iddio. Ma qui non si veggono Dei; e solamente diavoli, infamità e lutti. È un universo prospettato tutto sotto il segno dell'inferno. (1932: 96–97)

[The impression could not be more forbidding and hostile; and not only hostile, but in all its intensity, almost unfathomable. It is as if you find yourself present and in some way participating in a reality founded upon inhuman and perverted principles: as if you were in contact, more or less directly, with the Devil ... Even the Devil is a collaborator of God. But here you do not see gods, but only devils, infamies and mourning. It is a universe that has been formed in the sign of the Inferno.]

Echoing within Cecchi's writing on Teotihuacán are the reflections of an enlightened nineteenth-century scholar and more faintly the perception of the Aztec religion recorded by the Spanish chroniclers soon after the conquest of Central America. The feeling of repulsion and distress

communicated in the above extract is achieved primarily by the unsparing use of abusive terms tinged with an element of dismay. The aggressive terminology used to disavow all that the locality signifies would appear to hint at the extreme diversity between the sight and its perceiver, but as before the response is conflictual. In relying upon the conceptual apparition of Satan to assert his meaning, Cecchi followed Cattaneo, who in turn had quoted the Sahagún on the intimacy of the Aztec priest's relation with the Devil.⁴¹ But the use of language that was redolent of Dante's *Inferno* and of ideas that are fundamental to a Judeo-Christian scheme of religious worship served paradoxically to establish a distance between the narrator and the object of his description while at the same time creating a point of contact between the two. Inscribed in the very process of disavowal were elements of recognition and narcissistic identification. Again the experience that is narrated can be explored further by recourse to the Freudian concept of the uncanny.

If the 'heimlich' or homely means that which is intimate and concealed from others, then its negation, the 'unheimlich', acts, as Rosemary Jackson has written, to expose areas that are normally kept out of site: 'the uncanny ... uncovers what is hidden and by so doing effects a disturbing transformation of the familiar into the unfamiliar' (1981: 65). Part of the reason why the experience of the uncanny has a shocking dimension is that it reveals an interstitial region, the existence of which is normally obscured by the homely. The revelation of such a region may be distressing since it acts to disrupt the perceiver's settled relationship with his or her self and surroundings. In his visit to the Aztec pyramids, the traveller is confronted with what seems to be the underside of his own culture. The uncanny inscription of the familiar within the alien is made to seem all the more disturbing because a scene which could be taken from the *Inferno* appears in concrete reality: the boundary between reality and imagination has been partially effaced. The apparition of the infernal scene has not only been displaced from a literary context but has undergone a series of grotesque alterations. The populace of demons occupies an exalted status, not a lowly one, and death, rather than eternal life, is celebrated: the Christian system of belief has, quite literally, been turned upside down.

Conclusion

Neither Cecchi's narration of his journey through Mexico nor Appellius' Indian travelogue can be classified as a landmark of literary modernism, but in both texts the encounter with the foreign space is represented as occurring beyond the level of conscious reasoning. The texts present their

reader with instances where the writer, intuiting a closeness to cultural forces of great power, draws back expressing feelings of dismay or even of horror. The complex psychological reactions that are represented in both texts reveal a good deal about their authors' ideas on religion, on order and even on their understanding of sexuality. In many instances highly individual responses are expressed but in other cases it is the assertion of collective attitudes that is most striking. The distinction between race and culture was not visible to either writer, and the judgements that they unhesitatingly pronounced concerning one cultural phenomenon or another tended to reinforce deeply embedded ideas of racial hierarchy. Their denigration of aspects of the societies that they toured resulted from unfavourable comparisons with their own models of organization or behaviour. Yet, the intricacy of the two texts is such that they can be read both as expressions of some of the most entrenched beliefs of the period *and* as indications of the inherent frailty of these beliefs. When confronted with manifestations of collective behaviour that shocked their notions of what was 'normal' or 'civilized', both writers sought to assert what in their view constituted the supremacy of European categories of thought. But such assertions were never advanced with absolute certainty and on some occasions they encouraged an awareness of the contingency of the terms in which both writers attempted to frame their own sense of superiority.

The ambivalence of the writing was greatest when it addressed the impact of centuries of European imperialism. At one level, both Appelius and Cecchi explicitly endorsed the colonial principle: Cecchi was among the army of journalists who celebrated the triumphal journey of the Duce to Libya in 1937 and Appelius was to play a leading role as a propagandist in the conquest of Ethiopia (see Chapter Four). Nevertheless, their respective works presented, to a degree unintentionally, a vision of the fragility of fundamental aspects of Western expansionism. This implied anxiety was shared by other texts of the period. Nella Orano, travelling through Algeria in the late 1920s with the explicit purpose of seeking out the signs of Roman dominance (see Chapter One), conveyed the impression of a space where Arab resistance to the assimilation of the behaviour and practices of a modern colonial power was strong. Appelius described the British Raj as a shaky theatrical performance and proclaimed that the significance of Gandhi was that he represented 'a gigantic insurrection of six religions, 2000 castes, 320 million people against Britain' (1925: 407). But, at the same time as he saw the ebbing of Anglo-Saxon influence, he predicted the growth of other forms of territorial and cultural expansion. Perhaps one of the most interesting features of his book was its implied analogy between colonial expansion and the spread of

religion. Describing Fascism as a new religion that made the spirit of the homeland its object of worship, he claimed that the prophet of this religion, Mussolini, spoke a language of universal application to millions of people around the globe.⁴² If the British imperial model was essentially materialist and had left India spiritually unchanged for the entirety of its rule, Appelius contended that the Fascist nation could exert a dominance, as Rome had done centuries before, 'through the very consciousness of its subjects' (1925: 496–97).

Appelius may have sincerely admired Gandhi and he may have believed in a notion of Fascism as a doctrine with the potential to alter the very deepest levels of religious feeling, yet any comparison he may have implied with Catholic universality was undermined by his derogation of the mass gatherings he witnessed, by his theory of racial decadence and by his repetition of the incommensurability of Asian and European consciousness.

In his journey through Mexico, Cecchi observed the attempted imposition of European belief systems, life-styles and cultural artefacts, but what he charted was the resistance and re-assertion of pre-Colombian attitudes and thought structures. He ended his book with a meditation on history and temporality in Mexico. To see Mexico was, in his words, to see the re-emergence of a race that had unconsciously retained much of a history that had been suddenly and brutally interrupted; it was to witness an aspect of an inconceivably deep-rooted process of re-orientation, a process that followed a 'slow and violent rhythm' of which the recent and bloody revolution was only a part. Though a European observer might become aware of an 'austere and cruel' sense of time where Aztec sculpture and Catholic ornamentation existed in 'absolute contemporaneity', any Western attempt to interpret the motive forces behind the evolution of Mexico's Indian population was, he suggested, wholly inadequate.

In much of *Messico* the author became the observer of an enduring but superficial form of cultural domination: through the acutely observed reactions of its author, the text documented an extreme degree of hybridity both in human behaviour and in artistic representation. But this very hybridity was not interpreted positively as the fusion over centuries of modes of thought and behaviour. Instead, the recognition of the familiar in the apparently unfamiliar produced a critically destabilizing effect upon the writer's sense of himself. In its erudition and in its introspective detail, Cecchi's work stands out from much travel writing of the 1920s and 1930s, yet its coupling of nostalgia for ancient examples of imperialism (see Chapter One) with dismay at instances of the interweaving of radically different cultures made it only one of many

articulations of a profoundly contradictory attitude; an attitude that lay at the basis of Italy's engagement with other countries in the interwar years.

Notes

1. Bill Buford began his introduction to the special issue of *Granta* on travel writing with the sentence: 'World War Two marked the end of the great age of travel' (1981: 5).
2. On the commercial success of *La sfinge nera* (1924), see the Introduction.
3. The language of anticipation was common to a number of other visitors to India; it was especially evident in the narrated journeys of Arnaldo Cipolla (1925) and Arnaldo Fraccaroli (1931). On the first page of his travelogue, Fraccaroli wrote of 'the fabulous name' of India 'shining through his imagination' and then asked 'but will it really be like that?' (1931: 1).
4. Appelius did not travel alone. He referred to being accompanied by 'a good Indian friend' (432) throughout his journey, yet gave very few details about his guide. The place names that are used are those of the time.
5. After having won favour with Arnaldo Mussolini, Appelius worked from 1922 for *Il Popolo d'Italia*. His collaboration with the paper – that was to finance his journeys from one part of the globe to another – was to last for over twenty years. On his entry into the world of Italian journalism, see his autobiography, *Da mozzo a scrittore* (1934) and Sposito (2002: 7–15).
6. Both Cipolla (1925: 53–56) and Fraccaroli (1931: 165–69) also visited Tibet. For a discussion on Italian expeditions to the country, see Polezzi (1998).
7. For the relation of Caillois' observations on this point to the work of Mauss and Durkheim, see Callois (1959: 7–9).
8. He wrote: 'Ruins and filth everywhere, flowers and excrement, naked beauties and human deformities' (1926: 337).
9. Fraccaroli, observing the burning ghats of Benares from the Ganges, wrote of 'descending into far distant epochs' and of losing any notion of the age in which he was living (1931: 136).
10. In evoking the eroticism of the rite, Appelius suggested that he was merely describing the logical extreme of the cult of carnal love, which he saw as fundamental to the Brahmanic faith (438). Writing a history of British travel accounts of Calcutta, Kate Teltscher has suggested that the expression of disgust often carried with it the imprint of desire (201).
11. The author did not identify any work of physical anthropology, whether Italian or otherwise, on which his assertions were based.
12. In Appelius' view, Hindu philosophy was inaccessible to the European spirit because of the emphasis it placed on the annihilation of individual volition and desire: the Brahmanic idea of perfection equated to a Western idea of 'idiocy and madness' (1926: 15, 243–44).
13. The influence of the adventure stories of Emilio Salgari on the imagination of most Italian visitors to India in the early part of the twentieth century is often close to the surface. Alongside his many travel books, Cipolla produced a series of fictional stories set in distant locations (see 1923 and 1928).

14. Cattaneo's essay on India was originally printed in 1845 in the *Rivista Europea* with the title 'Sull'imperio Indo-britannico'. For a history of the essay's publication, see Cattaneo (1972a: 494).
15. Other texts testify to the fraternization of Italian journalists with colonial officials: Fraccaroli befriended the Governor of Madras (1931: 219); while Cipolla was received by the Marquess of Reading, Viceroy of India (1921–26), in his official summer residence in Shimla in June 1922 (1925: 83–97).
16. Appelius, as usual, did not provide a record of his sources.
17. Visiting the monumental administrative buildings at the base of Delhi's Raisina Hill, Fraccaroli repeated almost word for word his assertion. He wrote of seeing a 'theatrical exhibition' of power (1931: 182).
18. In the words of Appelius, 'India is today what in reality it was 3,000 years ago ... It begins and ends in Bramha' (1926: 233).
19. In the words of De Lorenzo (1931: 14), the world was watching the challenge to British rule in India.
20. Writing in *Critica Fascista* (1931), V. Piccoli expressed an equally negative view, quoted in De Felice (1988: 193). For other contemporary views, see Formichi (1929) and Viator (1930).
21. Arnaldo Mussolini's address was made on 17 January 1929 and published in the collection of his speeches (1934: 94). For a detailed study of the reception of Ghandi in Italy, see Franci (1985), Prayer (1988) and Sofri (1988).
22. The Calles administration was to last from 1924 to 1928. For a textual and photographic account of the Mexican Revolution and its aftermath, see Anita Brenner and George Leighton (1971).
23. Appelius' visit to Mexico was part of a journey through other countries of Central America, and occurred before he travelled to Chile, Patagonia and Argentina. His articles on Mexico were published by *Il Popolo d'Italia* and later collected in the volume, *L'aquila di Chapultepec* [The Eagle of Chapultepec] (1929).
24. He accomplished the initial part of his journey with a colleague, Worth Ryder, at the University of California. For a history of the stages of the journey, the details of the articles he published on Mexico and the alterations that were made to these, see Margherita Ghilardi's extensive editorial comments (Cecchi 1997: 1798–1821).
25. The text is one of the very few travelogues of the interwar period still to be in print (Milan: Adelphi, 1985) complete with an introduction by Italo Calvino. The book was the object of Gianfranco Contini's praise (1974) and, as Gian-Paolo Biasin (1993: 73) observed, the book provided an 'indispensable antecedent' for Calvino's own experience as a tourist in Mexico in 1976, an experience subsequently to be captured in the short story, 'Sotto il sole giaguaro' (1986).
26. Cattaneo's essay was originally published in 1860: see *Opere scelte* (1972b: 226). On the history of the publication of Sahagun's *New Spain*, see Todorov (1982).
27. In the bibliographical note at the end of *Messico* (1932: 149–51) he defined *The Plumed Serpent* as offering a picture of the revolutionary Mexico that lay somewhere between Freud and d'Annunzio.
28. The information on Bynner's relationship with Lawrence is contained in Ronald Walker's introduction to *The Plumed Serpent* (1990). Bynner himself was later to describe his time in Lawrence's company in the work, *Journey with Genius* (1951).

29. The essay on the *corridos* of the Revolution was not published in the first edition of *Messico*. It first appeared in the *Corriere della Sera* on 22 March 1932. See Ghilardi's editorial comments (Cecchi 1997: 1814).
30. In his opinion, a 'sense of the funereal and a contempt for the nullity of existence' was at the basis of the Mexican temperament (Cecchi 1997: 621).
31. As we might expect, Cecchi was well informed about the work of other Mexican artists like Francisco Goitia and Guadalupe Posada. His criticism of the more innovative aspects of Rivera's style expanded into a wider denunciation of some of the most important movements of modern art, including cubism and abstract expressionism, and showed more clearly than ever the essentially conservative nature of his critical judgement.
32. For an account of the impact of Mexico on the imagination of British writers of the period, see Walker (1978).
33. A good example of this is the description of Rosalino in the essay 'The Mozo' in *Mornings in Mexico* (1927).
34. Young is commenting here on Homi Bhabha's essay, 'Of Mimicry and Man' (1994).
35. Involving bands of guerrillas (*Cristeros*) and culminating in the assassination of Obregón, Catholic rebellion broke out in the mid 1920s. It was provoked by the imposition of the restrictions on the Church established in the Constitution of 1917 (Gruening 1928: 275–81; Brenner and Leighton 1971: 82–85).
36. His article on the religious question, though it was published in the first edition of *Messico*, was rejected by the *Corriere* in the light of the recent rapprochement between the regime and the Vatican. See Ghilardi on this point (Cecchi 1997: 1801).
37. The same observation was made by Cipolla (1927: 22).
38. The figures given by Gruening (1928: 229) were those of the census of 1910, according to which 15,115,343 of Mexico's population were Catholics against 82,167 professing all other creeds. Cecchi's interpretation was the same as that of Appelius (1929: 38–40).
39. For Gruening the placing of the favourite food of the departed on their tombs every 2 November was a continuation of the ancient worship of Teoyamiqui or Teomique, Goddess of Death (1928: 240).
40. The memory of the childhood episode was not included in the first edition but added in subsequent editions (see Cecchi 1997: 647). Ghilardi observes that the reflection was sketched out in Cecchi's notebooks shortly after his return to Italy from America (1997: 1817).
41. 'Hablaban personalmente con el demonio – Era tenido en mucho, muy respetado y obedecido de sus vasallos.' See Cattaneo (1972b: 239); as Delia Castelnuevo Frigessi documents, the quotation is taken from book 10, vol.3, of Sahagún's *Historia* (1830: 139).
42. This interpretation of Mussolini and the meaning of Fascism was printed in the interview with Gandhi for the *Popolo d'Italia*, 3 August 1924: 3.

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Chapter 3

The *Other* Spaces of Fascist Italy:

The Cemetery, the Prison and the Internal Colony

Many of the figures that made a name for themselves by writing as travellers to distant countries also narrated journeys to places within the Italian mainland. Indeed, in the 1920s and 1930s the representation of both well-known and obscure sites within the peninsula constituted a flourishing literary industry. Works belonging to this sub-genre were of varied character; they ranged from the largely factual account of the peculiarities of a town or province to the more stylized evocation of the subjective dimensions of a given space. The seductive portrayal of one region or another could serve to encourage tourism within the boundaries of the nation or it could act as the invitation to a more imaginary type of journey. Writing respectively for the *Corriere della Sera* and *La Stampa*, Emilio Cecchi and Margherita Sarfatti amply demonstrated a gift for the elegant depiction of rural and urban localities. Ugo Ojetti, a former editor of the *Corriere* (1926–27) and an influential voice in debates on the cultural life of the nation – Antonio Cederna described him as the ‘inspiration, the instigator and the arbiter of the prevailing bad taste of the 1930s’ (1979: xx) – specialized in jotting down his impressions of scenes of Italian life, but the list of well-known writers who published accounts of their travels through Italy is a long one. In 1933 the novelist and journalist, Corrado Alvaro, published the record of his journey from one end of Italy to the other.¹ Giovanni Comisso’s *Un Italiano errante per l’Italia* was printed in 1937.² The poet and critic Vincenzo Cardarelli published a series of evocations of Italian cities in 1939 with the title *Il cielo sulle città*.³ Perhaps most notably of all, Carlo Emilio Gadda published a collection of articles he had written on travels within Italy: *Le meraviglie d’Italia* (1939).⁴

Those writers who crafted elegant descriptions of aspects of Italy represented a fairly compact group – Mario Isnenghi has referred to them

as the essayists of the regime (1979: 135–45) – who often shared ideas and interest in one another’s work.⁵ Many of the texts that they produced have been reprinted on more than one occasion since the end of the Second World War and have been seen as exemplifying a kind of writing that maintained a degree of artistic independence from the prevailing pressure to underwrite the shared ideals of the time.⁶ Many of the texts elaborated strongly personal themes – Cecchi, for example, was fond of reminiscing at length on the Florence of his childhood just as Cardarelli constructed a detailed but largely fictitious idea of Etruria as the locus of his cultural heritage – while the linguistic complexity of much of this prose, with its conscious and constant allusions to the Italian canon, seemed to endorse an idea of the writer as the guardian of a timeless idea of literary purity. Yet, both directly and in ways that were less obvious, the writing on Italy in the interwar period both reflected the physical transformation of the country under Mussolini’s rule and contributed to the dissemination of a vision of the nation as a place whose history, traditions and popular culture inclined it naturally towards the path indicated by Fascism. In travelling from one part of the country to another, writers observed the major building projects of the regime and maintained that architecture was the language through which a nation expressed a sense of itself.⁷ They watched the reactions of crowds of Italians to the major events of the time as well as witnessing the effects of those events in more everyday settings and circumstances: on the successful conclusion of the invasion of Ethiopia in May 1936, Ugo Ojetti recorded his impressions of the mass celebration on the foundation of the empire and launched into a eulogy of Italy’s new identity as a colonial power.⁸ Many writers produced scenes of idyllic natural beauty but they also manufactured martial stereotypes of the Italian population in conformity with the pervasive militaristic cult. In his journey through central Tuscany, Alvaro depicted the agricultural worker and the artisan as heroic archetypes, and when he reached the former city states of the north-east, he claimed that the inhabitants of these places had for centuries colonized other lands both within Italy and abroad (1941: 233).⁹

The extent of this writing, its autobiographical allusions and its political ramifications are such that it can be examined in a variety of perspectives. I wish to analyse only a small section of this body of texts with the intention of showing how its evocation of metaphorical dimensions of certain localities was complicit with the dominant ideology of the time. More specifically, I want to read some of the many descriptions of sites within Italy through Foucault’s essay, ‘Of Other Spaces’ (1986), an article in which an influential theory for the categorization of space is advanced. The theory takes its starting point

from the idea of the utopia, suggesting that the utopia may offer a powerful vision of a society, that it may inspire action and belief although it is, by definition, a 'placeless place'. Foucault contends, however, that every society constructs spaces that can be defined as 'effectively enacted utopias', spaces that exist in reality and which can be visited or inhabited. Such spaces do not represent a non-place but an *other* space or, to use his terminology, a heterotopia. He argues that the main category of such sites is the 'heterotopia of deviation', a place or, more accurately, an enclosed society that is populated by those whose behaviour or condition deviates from, falls short of or has yet to become that which society regards as its norm. He then suggests that the heterotopic site is not freely accessible and that entry into its confines generally occurs under compulsion and in most cases entails a highly ritualized process of initiation. The very purpose of the heterotopia is to promote or coerce a change within the individual: the transformation may involve a strong re-orientation towards the collective and even an alteration in the subjective experience of time. A feeling of disquiet, disorientation or the perception of a threat to personal identity may well accompany the entry into the domain of the heterotopia. Like the purely imaginary utopia, it presents a vision of the perfect organization of space.

As various commentators have revealed (Genocchio 1995: 37–42), the essay is not without its flaws or ambiguities: one might argue that any defined site can be seen as 'other' to a number of different sites, or that since so many places can lay claim to be in some way heterotopic, the concept becomes overburdened and ultimately rather meaningless. The essential points of the essay do, however, carry more weight when 'Of Other Spaces' is placed more securely within the context of Foucault's thought. Though published shortly before his death in 1984, it was based on a lecture which he had given in 1967, after he had published his two works, *Madness and Civilization* (1961) and *The Birth of the Clinic* (1963), but a few years before the appearance of *Discipline and Punish* (1975), and it is this last work that serves to illuminate some of the assertions on which the argument of the essay hinges.¹⁰ It is in *Discipline and Punish* that Foucault expounds his thesis that modern society depends upon an efficient, highly rationalized system of disciplinary power which is articulated not only through modifications to penal practices but through the emergence of institutions that serve to exert forms of social control and 'strategies of normalization'.¹¹ He writes of the carceral texture of the school (1991: 228), the military barracks and the hospital, and asks: 'Is it surprising that prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons?' (ibid.). The concept of the heterotopia becomes more convincing when it is used to

define segregated institutions or places where social policies are articulated, where technologies of power are at their most visible and where ideals of social ordering are physically enacted. Such sites are defined by their absolute perfection, they are spaces that encourage or necessitate a definite revision of how the individual either constitutes him/herself or is constituted by the regime of which s/he is a subject.¹²

The emphasis which 'Of Other Spaces' places upon forms of control that are blatant or coercive, and its suggestion that the heterotopia is central to the grand project of creating a rational order of things, make the theory of the existence of the 'effectively enacted utopia' and its changing relation with the society in which it occurs highly appropriate to debates concerning modernity and its implications.¹³ In Fascism's attempt to transform the national character of Italians and to involve the individual in the struggle of competing nations, segregated institutions served an indispensable role in subjecting the individual to the control of the state. The military barracks, the Fascist academies, the *Campo Dux* were clearly important sites as indeed was the periodic transformation of the public square of most towns into an area of indoctrination. But the sites of such institutions or spaces also acted as mass cultural texts, vehicles for the expression of articles of faith, places of ritualistic or sacred importance where grand narratives of the past, present and future could be experienced. On their journeys through Italy, all the writers that I have referred to wrote, among many other things, on spaces that conformed entirely to Foucault's principles of the heterotopia. It is on the evocation of a selection of these sites – the place of commemoration, the prison and the internal colony – that I wish to concentrate. It is my contention that the literary perception of these *other* spaces indicates the kind of speculation, reverie and awe that such sites were intended to invoke. The musings of established writers on the heterotopias of Fascist Italy displayed the regime's mobilization of certain myths and how those myths might be experienced. This work shows an eagerness on the part of its authors to participate in the myth-making project of the regime, to become, in the words of Gentile, the 'propagandists of the cult of the Lictor' (1993: 200).

The Site of Commemoration

The first *other* space which I would like to look at is arguably the most obvious, that of the cemetery. Foucault writes that the cemetery is absolutely different from all the spaces that surround it, and yet that it is involved in a series of synchronies with all that lies beyond its boundaries. He refers to important changes that the cemetery has

undergone in Western culture, the most significant of these being its removal from the heart of the city to its periphery in the early nineteenth century as a result of a specifically modern fear of contagion.¹⁴ In *Crowds and Power*, Elias Canetti examines how societies use the cemetery or site of commemoration as a vehicle for sacred contact with the invisible dead (1992: 47–50). As a movement which presented itself as the voice of the wishes of the fallen in the First World War, which propagated an ideology of heroic sacrifice leading to regeneration and which sought to recover the imperial grandeur of the ancient past, Italian Fascism was peculiarly adept at mobilizing a dynamic symbology of death.

The regime both built an enormous number of sites of commemoration and exploited these in its extensive ceremonial calendar. These sites can be divided into three separate but related categories. Firstly, amid the huge construction projects to rid ancient Roman monuments of the buildings that had obscured them during what Mussolini referred to as the ‘centuries of decadence’ (Cederna 1979: xi), Roman tombs were restored and isolated. In 1934, most spectacularly, the architect Vittorio Ballio Morpurgo began the process of creating a huge space around the tomb of Augustus. The work was completed by September 1938 to coincide with the celebrations marking the 2000th anniversary of Augustus’s birth.¹⁵ The scale of both the work itself and the celebrations that accompanied its completion testified to the extent to which the Duce considered himself to be a kindred spirit of the Roman emperor, and in the euphoria of September 1938 it was even suggested that Augustus’s tomb should serve as a temple to the values of Italian Fascism. Secondly, the state consecrated various resting places for the martyrs of Fascism, the most important of these was situated in the crypt of the church of Santa Croce in Florence – it was on the carefully prepared itinerary that Hitler followed during his visit to Italy in May 1938. The state also celebrated figures who were deemed to have played an important role in the formation of modern Italy. In 1932, for example, the mortal remains of Anita Garibaldi were exhumed in Genoa and reburied in Rome, amid a huge parade symbolizing the Blackshirts’ continuation of the mission of Garibaldi’s Redshirts.¹⁶ Thirdly, during the two decades of its rule, the regime successfully appropriated the memory of the dead of the First World War. The dead were seen as the predecessors of the Fascist revolution who had shed their lives so that a new Italy could be born: from 1922 onwards every town or city in Italy was required to have a monument to the dead and an avenue of remembrance, and from 1928 onwards the regime built over forty cemeteries for the war dead, including the monumental constructions of Oslavia, Caporetto, Monte Grappa and Redipuglia.¹⁷

An analysis of the recorded journeys that the literary commentators of the time made to cemeteries and commemorative spaces reveals some of the properties of the Fascist appropriation of the rhetoric of death. There was no shortage of such written accounts: in *Le meraviglie d'Italia* (1939), Gadda described a visit to Milan's monumental cemetery; in his prose writings, Ojetti reported his journeys to sites of remembrance throughout Italy; Cecchi visited both well-known and obscure graveyards (1934c); Giovanni Papini, in *Italia mia* (1942: 105–16), gave a panoramic view of Italy's fields of rest. These narrated visits display some individual features, but they are all characterized by a willingness to repeat propagandistic notions of Italian history. Ugo Ojetti, for example, wrote for the *Corriere della Sera* on the renovated tomb of Augustus, suggesting that instead of the rows of cypress trees proposed by Antonio Munoz, the restored monument should be covered with statues of the emperor and his family as testimony of the regime's veneration of the man and the 'faith which it draws from such a cult' (1942: 27–33).¹⁸ He also narrated his journey to the Roman necropolis in Ostia, stating quite baldly that monuments were 'history made visible' and that the recent discovery of the site was yet another manifestation of the rebirth of the Italian nation.¹⁹ He professed to being startled by the way in which the site of the Roman dead had remained intact and how he had managed to gain access to this silent city where each inhabitant occupied an allotted place. He found himself in a space where the spirits of the ancient dead were both present and absent, while his prose articulated the messages which he, as mediator, appeared to receive. Coming across the tomb of the priest, Archigallo, he wrote:

Ha ... due rughe profonde tra gli occhi. Altre due rughe gli scendono dalle narici al mento quadrato, e la piega della bocca è amara come di chi ha molto veduto e niente dimenticato, ma s'è composto e adagiato da sè così, per morire, sicuro che Roma non muore, e il resto, bene e male, gioia e dolore, amore e odio, gloria e silenzio, non conta. (1951c, 2: 799)

[He ... has two deep lines between his eyes, another two lines run from his nose to his square chin, the expression of his mouth is bitter like some one who has seen a great deal and forgotten nothing, but who has composed his expression thus before dying, sure in the knowledge that Rome will not die, and that everything else, whether good or bad, joy or suffering, love or hate, glory or silence, is of no consequence.]

A piece of writing like this can be read as an elegant speculation on the sort of feelings which any visitor to a museum or archaeological site might experience. But, when placed within a context of the drive to instil a dynamic relationship between a dubiously constructed notion of the ancient past and an increasingly imperial present, the passage reveals other connections. Both Cecchi (1937) and Ojetti expressed their support

for the restructuring of central Rome that was promoted vigorously by Mussolini, with the specific intention of elaborating through metaphors of space the lineal descent of Fascism from ancient Rome. The *via dell'Impero*, which was carved between Piazza Venezia and the Colosseum and inaugurated in 1933, was intended to serve as a place where ordinary Italians might reflect upon the grandeur of the ancient past and be inspired to emulate the achievements of their forefathers.²⁰

More significant than the places of the Roman dead were the cemeteries of the First World War. The guide compiled by the Consociazione Turistica Italiana (C.T.I.) to the major battlefields and the sites of commemoration in the valley of the Isonzo river suggested that various types of 'pilgrim' – veterans from the conflict, relatives of the dead, or simply tourists – would be drawn to the places it described but that all would experience, before this immense altar, a vision of the cross symbolizing the 300,000 soldiers who had redeemed Italy through the supremacy of their sacrifice (1939: 1–2). Among the visitors to the cemeteries of the war dead in Friuli and the Veneto was Ugo Ojetti, who narrated his pilgrimage to Aquileia, a place invested with strong metaphorical associations. The town, itself dating back to Roman times, was occupied by Italian troops in June 1915, only to be re-taken by the Austrians in November 1917 before becoming permanently part of Italy after the final victory of Vittorio Veneto (C.T.I. 1939: 134). It was from the town's cemetery, in the shadow of the Roman basilica, that the body of Italy's unknown soldier was selected before being taken by train to Rome to lie at the Altare della Patria.²¹ In his evocation of the place, Ojetti collapsed the remembrance of the dead of the First World War with the memory of Rome. Focussing on Aquileia's Roman heritage, he suggested that the Austrians may have feared the existence of 'a city of the dead' who could 'suddenly spring to life and shout, Rome!' (1951a, 1: 266–67). When he paid his respects to the war dead, he sensed the continued existence of the hidden crowd that conveyed 'a confused communication through which we, the survivors, have not yet learned to find our path' (1951a, 1: 267). The dead seemed to beckon the living to achieve similar feats to the ones they had attained and Ojetti imagined their spirit participating in the rites that were celebrated on the cemetery's stone altar. In the officially sponsored literature of the time, the participation of the crowd of the dead in the ceremonies of the living was a common topos. In his description of the same place, Fernando Zanon (1933) did not seek to conceal the brutality of warfare – referring to the dead as the asphyxiated, the machine-gunned and the torn apart – but like Ojetti he saw suffering as lyrical rather than horrifying and imagined the dead of the war silently communing with the heroes of Aquileia's Roman past.²²

Many other writers wrote on their visits to places of remembrance: considering the huge number of memorials which had appeared in the squares of Italian towns in the 1920s and 1930s, the editor of the cultural magazine *Omnibus*, Leo Longanesi, admired how archetypes of the people were celebrated, and affirmed that the visit to one or more of the many war memorials represented ‘an extremely beautiful journey into the paradise of the fallen heroes’ (1948: 40).²³ Alive to the messages of the dead, Gadda wrote at the end of a description of the main cemetery in Milan:

Al di sopra del tempo sono le verità religiose: i fulgidi atti dei caduti, il loro sacrificato dolore: e il travaglio di quelli che ne predisposero al mondo, l’angoscia e la speranza onde suggerivano la parola ‘vivi!’ alla nostra anima infante.²⁴

[Above time there are religious truths, the sublime actions of the fallen, their sacrificed pain, the labour of those who prepared them for the world, the suffering and the hope with which they, the fallen, suggested the word ‘Live!’ to our infant soul.]

The cemetery emerged from these writings as a vehicle for making the past present, for affording a vision of the essence of Italian identity, for inspiring future action. In presenting this conception of the cemetery, Gadda, Ojetti and others relied on the familiar rhetoric of a whole sub-genre of cemeterial literature stretching back to Foscolo’s *Dei sepolchri* (1807) and beyond. But, in the light of a number of considerations, the writing assumed an ideological coloration which was more easily associable with Fascism. To begin with, the link that the writing almost invariably drew between the dead of the war and the memory of the ancient Romans implied that the Italian soldiers are another manifestation of the same enduring spirit. The writing echoed elements that were present in the cemeterial architecture itself: Monte Grappa was modelled in the form of a Roman mausoleum, while the entrance to Redipuglia was emblazoned with the symbol of the fasces. Mussolini’s drive to renew the spirit of ancient Rome depended in part on the replacement of a paramount sense of the real with an induced experience of myth, and those figures who wrote on the sensations they underwent in sites of commemoration conveyed a powerful impression of the sacred, of a movement between the mythic and the quotidian, of a collapsing of the human into the monumental. They suggested that the dead of the war cemeteries were not merely the object of collective mourning, but that they exerted an invisible pressure for change: on numerous occasions Mussolini invoked the authority of the dead to lend weight to his pronouncements, while the anonymous visitor sent by *Le Vie d’Italia* (1935: 386) to the inauguration of Monte Grappa, described the cemetery as a ‘blazing light which the Nation watches so as to attain, through one victory after another, peace through justice’.

Italian Fascism may not have created a coherent vision of the afterlife, but it did encourage the belief that time was eternal for some and that the social had its roots in the divine. Renato Michelesi ended his pilgrimage through the resting places of the war dead by quoting the words of the memorial of Aquileia: 'These valorous soldiers are not dead and will never die. Leaving their mortal remains to the earth, they have risen to glory and immortality' (1939: 1443). Not only did the written accounts of journeys to war cemeteries reflect on the collective identity of the dead, they also suggested the continuation in eternity of military hierarchies. The visitor to such places as Redipuglia, Monte Grappa or Oslavia [Figure 3.1] observed their spatial organization. Redipuglia, the work of Giannino Castiglioni and Giovanni Greppi, housed the mortal remains of around 100,000 soldiers of the third army, arranged in ascending rows behind the tombs of the Duca d'Aosta and five of the army's generals. The inscription that adorned the cemetery's walls, 'Presente', was paralleled in other burial places by writings such as 'Monte Grappa you are my homeland' – suggesting a devotion to the nation that continued *after* death. It was not only the fidelity of the soldier that the writings celebrated, but also, perhaps less overtly, the total appropriation of the individual by the state. The dead of the war lay under the sign of the cross and the fasces. The regime, by the structure that it reserved for the dead, collapsed the war hero with the Fascist martyr.

Foucault contends that the heterotopia functions in the way that is akin to the mirror: the person who looks into the mirror sees him/herself in a virtual space: from this space the subject looks out at the place where in reality it resides. From the vantage point of its temporary location in the unreal space of the mirror, the subject constructs an identity for itself. In the writings of visitors to the cemeteries of the war dead, the heterotopia of the cemetery, though it afforded images of an exclusively masculine order, was being used as a mirror of all the spaces that lay outside. In entering the cemetery, the writer entered a location that offered a perfect vision of social order, of hierarchical distinctions and collective mythologies that were set in stone. The site of commemoration was as still and as silent as the world outside was noisy and chaotic. It presented a unified image of a culture that was in reality fragmentary and dispersed. The cemetery seemed to make evident that which was concealed in the general bustle of life that surrounded it. The writer entered a realm where structural relations were expressed through concrete and metaphorical dispositions of space; he communed with the inhabitants of this other city; and he left, in Michelesi's words, with a sense of 'great humility, of profound veneration, of intense gratitude' (1939: 1443). On his journey to the nationalistic utopia, he had experienced the presence of the heroic dead.



Figure 3.1. The cemetery at Oslavia photo by Lazzaro, circa 1930. Reprinted with the permission of the Alinari Archives, Florence.

The Prison

The second *other* space that I would like to look at is again an obvious one, the prison. In his conclusion to *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault contends that the prison is at the centre of a carceral network that reaches out through all the disciplinary mechanisms of society to ensure that the individual is subject to various processes of normalization and that his/her body and behaviour are under perpetual (panoptic) observation. Dario Melossi and Massimo Pavarini (1981: 63–97) have provided a history of the prison's development in Italy, indicating the existence of feudal models of imprisonment in parts of the country before unification and the introduction of the principles of the modern prison (including set hours, searches and uniforms) at different stages in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.²⁵ Their thesis accords with the vision that Foucault offers in *Discipline and Punish* insofar as they see the prison as a defining institution of modern society, arising 'at the same time and in a particular relationship with the capitalist mode of production' (1981: 6). They stress the point that in modern capitalist societies the prison was modelled on the factory and that its corrective function was originally to mould human beings to the growing system of wage labour.

The Fascist regime could claim, with some justification, that it had created a period of order and stability.²⁶ When considered as a period in the history of the evolution of the prison, the *ventennio nero* did not, however, represent a major turning point or phase of radical innovation. That said, the twenty-year period did witness an increasing tendency to criminalize various kinds of action or behaviour, an extension of types of punishment and the consolidation of the country's penal institutions. Under Fascism, Italy reintroduced the death penalty for crimes deemed to imperil the security of the state, it developed the notion of the internal exile as a punishment and legitimated sporadic, institutional violence.²⁷ The law for the defence of the state (passed in November 1926) made it a crime to belong to any of the newly proscribed political parties. In 1941, Dino Grandi (Minister of Justice 1939–43) published a report on the progress of penitentiary reform in the ten years since the ratification (1 July 1931) of Alfredo Rocco's New Penal Code.²⁸ The report stretched to two volumes and included an extensive series of photographs of Italy's prisons and their population. In the preface to the volume, Grandi described penal reform as being essentially double-sided: on the one hand, it encouraged greater severity in the punishment of serious crimes; on the other, it placed greater emphasis than preceding administrations had done on the rehabilitation of the criminal. In Grandi's words, prisons were not intended to be 'tombs for living men', but were to be considered

more as sites of enforced discipline which the prisoner would pass through before re-entering the collective life of society. Religious observance played an important role in this redemptive process – Grandi wrote of attendance at Mass as providing a concrete indication of moral discipline and he defined the prison chaplain as an essential figure in the functioning of the carceral system (1941, 1: 158). But the prisoner was expected to be transformed less by Catholic teaching than by industrial or agricultural work. In the 1930s the inmates of Italian prisons were often used as the labour force in various land reclamation schemes and many of the photographs of Grandi's report displayed flourishing rural communities which had arisen out of the toil of prison inmates. Details are given of the stages of land reclamation in the Sardinian localities of Castiadas and Porto Conte and of their consignment to the Ferrara corporation for colonization [*Ente ferrarese per la colonizzazione*].

The apparent success of Italian Fascism in gradually reducing crime figures and in transforming large sections of the prison population into a dependable labour force served a considerable propagandistic purpose. Not only could the state present itself as responsive to problems of social order, it also demonstrated the appeal of Fascist codes of discipline and behaviour on even the most recalcitrant and marginalized groups of society.²⁹ The renovation of existing prison complexes [Figure 3.2] and the building of new ones which occurred in the 1930s was an essential part in the increasing regimentation of society. Grandi drew attention to the sums which the state was prepared to employ in the 'reclamation' (witness the deployment of the same terminology to refer to territory and people) of wayward human beings. His report detailed the extent of improvements to carceral institutions throughout Italy and the date of their completion. The report also set forth the building programme of the state into the 1940s. This included the extension of the prisons of Bologna, Novara and Forlì and, more interestingly, the plan to build a huge complex in Rome to house all the penitentiary institutions of the capital.³⁰

Leading journalists were encouraged to visit prisons that the state had newly opened or renovated. In 1934, as a correspondent of the *Corriere della Sera*, Cecchi visited both a reform school for girls in Airola (completed in June 1931) and the well-known prison for the criminally insane in Aversa (re-organized in the early 1930s). Similarly, Ojetti wrote of visits to institutions in both Rome and Florence, and at Christmas 1938 he visited the women's prison of Santa Verdiana (Florence), where he listened to midnight Mass. The two journalists did not focus on individual cases, but mapped instead the collective characteristics of the people they saw. They did not define the inmates as criminals, but as prisoners who



Figure 3.2. The reformatory at Nisida, photo by Armando Bruni, 1938. Reprinted with the permission of the Alinari Archives, Florence.

were in the process of being transformed without the need for harsh punishments: in Aversa, Cecchi observed how all forms of violent containment had been replaced by the application of the Albertian code which privileged nocturnal isolation and daily labour. As well as witnessing discipline working adequately, the visitors observed the ready submission of the inmates to the administrative regime that exercised control over both their minds and their bodies. The submissive attitude displayed by the prisoners was presented as evidence of an understanding that personal dignity could be obtained through obedience and as proof of a need for redemption. In Santa Verdiana, Ojetti concentrated on Christian imagery: the women prisoners inhabited a former monastery and their warders were nuns; they were observed celebrating Mass at Christmas; they replied with one voice to the injunctions of the priest. Ojetti even imagined the sound of their hymns reaching over the walls of the neighbouring men's prison, Le Murate, implying that those who were punished preached a message of hope to the unconverted (1951d, 2: 738).³¹

The similarity that was posited both by Ojetti and Cecchi between a Christian model of redemption and the perceived transformation of the criminal that occurred in the prison was blind to striking differences. The Christian sinner atones voluntarily for wrongdoing, whereas the atonement of the criminal is coerced; the sinner who asks for forgiveness becomes a servant of God, the criminal is transformed into an institutional being; the soul of the repentant sinner is commended to God, while it is the state who takes charge of the criminal. Keen to convey an idea of society's appropriation of the individual, Cecchi wrote:

L'uomo entra qui nudo come nella camera mortuaria ... La sua identità ricoincide con la sua pelle. Attraverso l'infinita miseria, è riportato alla sua sola sostanza corporea e morale. E si effettua per lui una nuova vestizione ... La società l'ha riaccolto, e l'avvolge in un clima d'austera abnegazione al quale egli impara a riaffidarsi. (1934a)

[Man enters this place as naked as when he enters the mortuary ... His identity coincides with his body. Through unending poverty, he is reduced to being simply his bodily and moral substance, then he is dressed once more ... Society has taken him up and wrapped him in a climate of austere abnegation to which he learns once more to entrust himself.]

Though in many respects this kind of writing is simply facile, it has an undeniably disturbing dimension: the analogy that it makes between the penitentiary universe and the Christian site of redemption, between the power of the state and divine authority, reinforces the idea that the prison is a kind of utopia, while the inmate is presented as a model to be emulated. In his visit to the reform school in Airola, Cecchi had difficulty in believing that the inmates were prisoners, and found that their collective behaviour cast an interrogative glance at the visitor:

Le ragazze scattavano in piedi, dietro ai loro piccoli banchi da scuola elementare, alzando la mano tutte insieme, nel saluto al direttore, al medico, alla superiora. Direi che sembravano fatte d'una sostanza più aspra della nostra e di quella delle cose intorno ... Se Dio vuole, non le sentivo carcerate, prigioniere. (1934b)

[The girls jumped up from their seats, from behind their little desks they all raised their hands at the same moment, greeting the governor, the doctor and the mother superior. I would say that they seemed made of a harsher fabric than ours, a fabric harsher even than the things which surrounded them ... As God is my witness, I did not feel them to be in prison or to be prisoners.]

But the behaviour of the prison population reflects the totality of institutionalized power: the prisoner is, by definition, deprived of liberty. If the prison is a society that serves as a model for the spaces which lie outside, then by implication the society that the journalists favoured was one where individual freedom was sacrificed for collective security, where the coercive power of the state was obvious and un-resisted, where individuals were disciplined and mechanized. What was perhaps most significant in the recorded journeys of the two writers was the use of a rhetoric which immediately revealed similarities with that employed in the description of other institutions which, on the surface, would seem to bear little relation to the prison. The two writers admired the process whereby the individual was made a subject of institutional power, they associated (albeit implicitly) the prisoner with all those who belonged to the newly created organizations of the state, and suggested that the prisoner offered an extreme example of the drive of Italian Fascism to remould Italians through specifically militarized practices.

While it is not within the scope of this chapter to explore perceptions of life inside one or other of Italy's prisons that may have been closer to the reality than the writing of Cecchi or Ojetti, it is worth pausing briefly on points of comparison between their writing and that of a prison governor, Riccardo Conti, who published in 1938 a work with the comprehensive title of *Il mondo delle prigioni* [The Prison World]. Not the work of a professional writer but of a civil servant, the text represented a type of literature that was not predicated on impressionistic judgements. It discussed at length the differentiation of prisoners and the adequacy or otherwise of types of punishment as well as considering penal reform within a wide arch of time. For a book written in the final years of the *ventennio* it was sparing in its use of the customary rhetoric. Yet, Conti expressed his approval of Rocco's Penal Code and argued strongly that the justice system in Italy was imbued with principles that derived from Catholic philosophy and that intended to respect the 'human personality' (1938: 307) of the prisoner. From this standpoint, he was openly critical of Nazi eugenics and of endocrinological experiments in

America aimed at isolating the supposedly somatic causes of delinquency (305–8). Above all, his work reiterated a principle that was central to the law of 1931, on the regulation of the state's network of penitentiary institutions, namely, that work was a 'right and a duty' (259) even for the population of the country's prisons. Though he concluded his text with a measured discussion of the possibilities of re-education, the narrative of redemption that dominated the optimistic journalism of the time was clearly the keynote of his work.

The Internal Colony

My final choice of heterotopia is the internal colony. A feature of Fascist social policy that won resounding admiration from foreign observers was the programme of land reclamation and the building of new towns across Italy.³² Mussolini's birthplace of Predappio was among the first towns to be reconstructed. Under the supervision of the Ministry of Public Works, work began as early as 1925 and was more or less completed by 1930. The town, with its large boulevards, its impressive central square, surrounded by major public buildings, provided a precedent for the later urban developments. In 1928 work began on the building of the towns of the Pontine Marshes: Littoria (now Latina) was the most important of these and was intended to form the capital of the newly reclaimed region; other new towns such as Sabaudia, Pontinia and Aprilia were to serve as satellites. The creation of these new centres formed an essential part of the economic and demographic campaigns that were to take place in the 1930s. Overcrowding in the northern cities was to some extent offset by the migration of people (and, in particular, veterans of the First World War) to the newly established colonies south of Rome, the building of new towns together with the infrastructure which surrounded them were means by which the state could reduce unemployment through public works schemes.³³ The new towns provided material evidence of Mussolini's expressed desire to go towards the people and to bring Italians from different regions together in a huge joint enterprise. The building of places such as Littoria occurred in record time: workers were engaged round the clock to prove the rapidity with which the Fascist state could rebuild Italy.³⁴

Apart from whatever pragmatic purpose these sites may have served, they conformed to Foucault's principles of the *other* space. More so than either the cemetery or the prison, the newly founded colonies south of Rome translated the modern utopian ideal into spatial practice. In themselves Mussolini's new towns created spaces that were, to use Foucault's language, 'perfect, meticulous and well arranged' (1986: 23).

They had the potential to become places where everything was absolutely regulated, they provided the regime with a flattering reflection of itself, while suggesting that all places could theoretically achieve the level of perfect order which they had almost instantaneously attained. All official media exalted the building of the towns, the completion of the land reclamation around them and the establishment of new communities on what had once been barren soil. The leading journalists, together with a whole raft of lesser-known figures, played their part in eulogizing the colossal transformation that the regime could orchestrate. At different times, both Cecchi and Ojetti paid visits to the new towns of the Pontine Marshes and sought to interpret the significance of these places (see below); writing for *Le Vie d'Italia* (1939b; 1941b) and for *Nuova Antologia* (1941a), Gadda narrated a series of journeys to the new settlements in rural Sicily and gave a panoramic description of the work of colonization underway in the province of Ferrara; Alvaro, as well as writing on the early phases of reclamation south of Rome (1934), wrote on internal colonization in the plain of Lombardy (1941: 237–51); Mario Puccini, on the appearance of the completion of the new town of Pomezia (1939); the writer and journalist, Stanis Ruinas, described in detail a journey (1939) that started with a tour of the new towns (Fertilia, Mussolinia and Carbonia) on the western side of his native Sardinia, a tour that moved through the settlements of Lazio then upwards to the extreme north-east of Italy and the mining town of Arsia on the Istrian peninsula.

In the written accounts of journeys to the newly carved spaces of Fascist Italy, an array of metaphorical constructions was brought to bear, but one metaphor in particular tended to predominate, that of the discovery of a new land. When he arrived in Littoria, the distinguished visitor, Ugo Ojetti, was taken on a guided tour of the locality.³⁵ He inspected the various construction sites and watched as workmen from ‘every corner of Italy’ set to work on transforming ‘this land that has been discovered now so that a new Italy can be created’ (1951b: 408). When Cecchi narrated his visit to the same town, the reference to the biblical myth of creation was even stronger. He observed how it had taken only a few years for a thriving centre to emerge from a wasteland, he contrasted the natural state of the environment with its new character and meditated on the vision of humanity that the place afforded. So striking was this impression that he confessed to experiencing a trance-like sensation. He wrote:

Dove la terra marcia pigramente maturava germi vegetali e animali, s’era violentemente sostituito il pulsare della macchina umana ... Uomini e donne erano balzati fuor del limo originario; e mi pareva di vederli nel sole, come nude statue della creazione, dietro alle cui teste vaporavano l’ultime nebbie sulla landa rasciutta. (1937b: 3)

[Where the rotten land indolently produced only larval vegetation and primitive animal life, the pulsating human machine has intervened ... Men and women have jumped out from the original silt, and it seemed to me as though I could see them in the sun, like the nude statues of creation, behind whose heads the last mists of the reclaimed plain were disappearing.]

Gadda, like Cecchi, delighted in constructing rhetorically a series of visions of a newly created rural paradise, while in Ruinas' richly illustrated text, photographs of new towns across the peninsula were always accompanied by pictures of the marshland on which they were built.³⁶ In the prose of these writers, the myth of a Fascist new world supplanted the Christian story of Genesis: Littoria was a new Eden and to make a journey to the Agro-Pontino was to be present at the time of creation. The rapidity of the appearance of new towns and settlements in Italy struck every visitor as astonishing, but as one commentator observed, Fascism had accustomed Italians to the sight of miracles.³⁷ The appearance of the new world that was witnessed in its diverse but similar manifestations had been brought into being not by the will of God, but by the will of the Duce. Not only had he set the work of colonization in motion, he had defined a definite time scale for its completion. In the piece which Ojetti wrote on Littoria, analogies between an all-seeing God and the surveying eye of the Duce abounded: the workers at the various construction sites carried pictures of Mussolini in their jackets in the same way that devout believers carry religious relics. The spontaneous veneration of patriarchal authority was accompanied by a fear that any delay in the progress of construction would incur the displeasure of the patron. As he observed the men working in different parts of the town, Ojetti saw in their physical appearance the reflection of the features of the Duce. When he went to the refectory to eat with the engineers, mechanics and workers he looked up to see a large portrait of Mussolini, 'Who stares down at us all' (1951b: 412).

In the same way that Mussolini posed as the embodiment of the ideal agricultural worker threshing the first grain to be harvested from the land surrounding Littoria (Ruinas 1939: 33), the rural settler was, in this kind of writing, elevated to the status of mythical archetype. Musing on the figure of the peasant farmer, Gadda repeated that the derivation of the Italian word 'contadino' was from the Latin 'colonus' and that colonization meant the consignment of the land to those who farmed it (1941a: 283; 1941b: 336). But it was not only Italy's elite of literary journalists who wrote with real or simulated amazement. The interpretation of Fascism that predominated in Goebbels' collection of impressions on Italy (1936) was that of a political force that endowed the process of radical social change with the aura of artistic creation.³⁸ The

material achievements of Fascism could thus be appreciated with the same facility that a visitor to a museum or art gallery could marvel at the exhibits on show. Admiring the 'audacious tenacity' (1936: 79) of the many building projects he saw, Goebbels claimed to be seized by the impulse to emulate the drive to express national values in 'the perpetuity of stone' (80). Of all the sites on his itinerary, it was Littoria that most captured his imagination, describing it as the jewel in Italy's crown and as Fascism's greatest work of art (85). What he claimed was most impressive about the town was that this living work of propaganda assumed human form in the actions and lifestyle of its inhabitants, none of whom had an easy life but all of whom, he asserted, were absolute adherents of the modern faith (85–86).

Various scholars have pointed to the association, which was made widely from the 1840s onwards, between the *social* reclamation of pauperism and criminality and the *agricultural* reclamation of uncultivated land.³⁹ What is striking about the writing by Italian journalists on the newly created internal colonies was the likeness of these spaces to the prison houses that Cecchi, Ojetti and others described elsewhere. Mussolini was presented as a benign and paternal figure, but his deified presence was everywhere: he was spiritually and physically close to the masses. Cecchi described the collective life of towns such as Littoria being punctuated by military and political ceremonies: such ceremonies affirmed the power of the state over the individual, while the imposing public buildings and the newly constructed towers served as reminders of authority [Figure 3.3].⁴⁰ It was not only the regime of surveillance that emerged as a key feature of the new colonies, social control was carried to an extreme. Language indicating the presence of the military model was frequently deployed: when describing the eight new settlements in Sicily, Gadda repeated that each one was named after a hero of the First World War and that the requests for settlement of the families of the war dead were given priority. In his conversations with the settlers (mostly from the Veneto) working the land near Littoria and Aprilia, Ruinas drew attention to their direct or indirect experience of the war.⁴¹ Ojetti noted how the workforce engaged in the rapid construction of Littoria was marshalled with precision. The militarization that he noticed occurred at all levels of the new society. The life of each individual followed a rigid pattern: each family had its allotted and numbered quarters, schoolchildren took a break from classes at the same time as the workers rested. Ojetti wondered what sort of entertainment the inhabitants of Littoria enjoyed and was told that: 'On Sundays there is dancing. Dancing is free from three till six at the Dopolavoro, and it costs four lire at the Cinematografo. Of course, only men pay'.⁴²



Figure 3.3. The town hall in Latina, photo by C. Burdett.

Every aspect of the new world was under literal or metaphorical surveillance, but there was no suggestion of coercion. The inhabitants were keen to respect the order of the regime and they willingly submitted to its routine and its guidelines. Their identity was consistently defined as collective: they were compared to military regiments or flocks of the faithful. The reader was left in no doubt that this was not a bourgeois colony, but a haven of the people. What this kind of writing documented was not merely the reclamation of a land surface, but a kind of internal colonization. The inhabitants of places like Littoria, at least as they were represented, had become ideal self-policing subjects – they were only too willing to obey absolute power, having been recast as model citizens of society. The internal colony was presented as a space where the perfection of the individual could be attained, but that perfection coincided entirely with conformity to the power structures that, with startling intensity, had been put in place. The affinities of this representation of place are, as I have suggested, more with utopian literature than they are with factual reporting: the figures who appeared in the prose endorsed a variety of arguments but their autonomy of speech was limited – no one voiced any criticism or pointed to divergences between the conception of the new settlement and its material working. In the course of his travels, Ruinas (1939), in particular, spoke to a vast array of settlers, engineers and administrators belonging to the major corporations for the colonization of the interior, but despite the inflections of class or region their message of unconditional approval was substantially the same.⁴³

Conclusion

It would not be difficult to add to the list of *other* spaces of the ‘carceral archipelago’, through which the regime sought to direct the behaviour, thought processes and even the memory of Italians. Though the property of the Agnelli family, the FIAT factory of Mirafiori was opened by the Duce on 15 May 1939 and presented as a perfect new city which catered for all the needs of its workers (Gromo 1939); institutions such as the Accademia Femminile Fascista in Orvieto were places where physical activities could be measured and subjectivities moulded; between 1932 and 1935 Rome’s new university was erected. Writing on its inauguration, Margherita Sarfatti (1935) referred quite literally to the complex as a kind of temple or cathedral created by the religion of the Lictor for its celebration.⁴⁴ These various institutions were spaces in which the social policies of Fascism were articulated. They also served the dynamic purpose of holding up a

mirror in which Fascist society could contemplate itself, and in this respect they served a role akin to the many exhibitions and demonstrations that filled civic life in the Italy of the 1930s. Like the famous exhibition of the Fascist revolution inaugurated at the Palazzo delle Mostre in Rome on 28 October 1932, for example, the new towns were a site of pilgrimage from which curious travellers could return after having witnessed visually the transformation of the country.⁴⁵ The towns were not so much a microcosm of the world outside as a model of what that world had the potential to become. They were essentially similar to the later building project of EUR, intended both to house the Universal Exhibition in 1942 and to provide a vision of the ideal colonial city. Known unofficially as 'Roma nuova', it was meant to reflect Italy's status as a modern colonial power. It was also built deliberately as a mirror: the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana reworked the structure of the Colosseum – the length of EUR from gateway to gateway coincided precisely with the distance from Piazza Venezia to Piazza del Popolo.⁴⁶ In so doing, EUR repeated through metaphors of space a common trope of writing about Italy's colonies, namely that they were a 'distant but significant reflection of national life' (Valori 1937: 1).

The use of the heterotopia to perform a function akin to the exhibition may hint at the deeply narcissistic quality of Italian Fascism, but it also points to the role of the writer/journalist in interpreting and disclosing the sensations which s/he experienced in visiting newly created or refashioned *other* spaces. The narrator of a journey to the cemeteries of the war dead, to the prison or to the internal colony passed from a cultural space that was ordinarily inhabited to one that was not: the experience was presented as both mystical and intense. The writer who visited the other space not only engaged with extraordinary categories of feeling, s/he was also confronted with the presence of those who were part of the heterotopia. Such individuals inhabited a locality that was constructed upon ideas of what life should be like outside; they provided virtual images of what human beings had still to become. In the presence of those who were part of the effectively enacted utopia, the writer was radically disconcerted. Foucault speaks of the heterotopia beginning to function fully when it entails an absolute alteration in the way in which the subject who belongs to it experiences time. The *other* space opens on to what he calls an *other* time, or heterochrony, most perfectly exemplified by the cemetery, which, for the individual, begins with 'the strange heterochrony, the loss of life, and with this quasi-eternity his/her permanent lot is dissolution and disappearance' (1986: 25).

Examining its commemorative celebrations, its rituals and exhibitions, Griffin (1998) has exposed the regime's awareness of qualitatively different experiences of time, and its success in manipulating an altered, collective

sense of temporality. He points, within the cult of the Lictor, to the individual's experience of anomic time giving way to a sense of mass belonging and purpose, to the intensity of crowd feeling having the potential to induce a sense of participation in the sacred and epic life of the nation. The journalists who visited the other spaces of Fascist Italy recorded the same powerful impression of moving between sacred and profane time. The inhabitant of the heterotopia appeared to experience time differently: its duration was eternal in the site of commemoration; it was organized mechanically in the prison; it was regimented and accelerated in the colony. As the journalists moved from one situation to another, they found themselves either in silent communion with the people they saw or else disturbed by the common identity of the latter. Each of the different temporal organizations that were witnessed were manifestations of the same higher concept of time, which itself was integral to the project of regenerating the nation. In a precisely analogous fashion, the variously described statuesque appearance of the inhabitants of the other space were indicative of a superior vision of humanity.

As they were celebrated in the writing of different commentators, the dead of the war, the reformed prisoner and the emigrant to the internal colony were emblematic of the transformation of the individual; they exemplified the tremendous power of the state to occupy the mind and behaviour of its citizens. The very absence of the figures' individuality affirmed a changed relationship between society and its members. If the *other* space, as Foucault contends, is a mirror in which all the real sites that can be found within a culture are represented, then those who belonged to the counter site were part of the specular process: their actions and appearance gave visibility to the Fascist project. In his round of journeys from one region to another, the Duce himself could observe the 'fervour of rebirth that the regime has shown its ability to spread in the hearts of all Italians'.⁴⁷ As the writings of Cecchi, Ojetti and a myriad of less well-known, but equally prolific, journalists illustrated, the institutions through which social control was exerted were surrounded with such a mythic aura of regeneration that they became objects of veneration, sacred spaces within the religion of the nation. That they pervaded those pilgrims who visited them with the sensation of transcendental power is merely one indication that control is at its most rigid when it is an object of worship.⁴⁸

Notes

1. Alvaro worked as a regular columnist for *La Stampa* and for other journals, including *Mediterraneo* and *Il Lavoro Fascista*. By the time he came to write his

Itinerario italiano he had published the highly successful works of fiction, *Gente in Aspromonte* (1930) and *Vent'anni* (1930).

2. The conflicting attitudes towards Fascism in Comisso's work of the 1930s are explored by Duncan (2002).
3. For a discussion of writing about Italy in a highly crafted literary style or 'prosa d'arte', which the journal *La Ronda* (1919–1922) had done much to promote, see Burdett (1999).
4. Dombroski (1984 and 1999) discusses the literary currents of the *ventennio nero* which affected the works of all these writers.
5. In his preface to his collection of writings (1939), for example, Gadda explicitly thanked Cecchi for the interest he had shown in the preparation of the volume.
6. Cardarelli's *Il cielo sulle città*, for example, was reprinted with suitable excisions by Mondadori in 1949. The collected essays of Ugo Ojetti, *Cose viste*, were reprinted by Sansoni in 1951 and in 1960.
7. Cederna (1979) considers the extent to which Cecchi and Ojetti were prepared to support the demolition work that was carried out in Rome to accomplish the architectural designs of the Duce.
8. In the prose piece he wrote for the *Corriere della Sera*, 'Stelle sull'impero' (9 May 1936), Ojetti created a mythic picture of ancient Rome based on watching Mussolini address a vast crowd of the capital's inhabitants. For an analysis of the episode and the writing in the *Corriere* that surrounded it, see Isnenghi (1979: 138–42).
9. For further analysis of Alvaro's journey through Italy, see Massimo Onofri's introduction to the 1995 re-print of the text.
10. The essay was entitled 'Des Espaces Autres' and initially published in *Architecture-Mouvement-Continuité* in October 1984. It was published in English in 1986. The English translation contains the details of the essay's history. *Madness and Civilization* was originally published as *Histoire de la Folie* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1961); *The Birth of the Clinic* as *Naissance de la Clinique* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1963); and *Discipline and Punish* as *Surveiller et punir: Naissance de la prison* (Editions Gallimard, Paris, 1975).
11. For an examination of Foucault's theory of normalization, see Lois McNay's introduction to his work (1994: 91–100).
12. A comparison can be made between such spaces and Erving Goffman's notion of the total institution, that is, 'places of residence or work where a large number of like situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life' (1961: xiii).
13. In *The Badlands of Modernity*, Kevin Hetherington (1997) uses the theory of spaces of alternate ordering to analyse the social practices in eighteenth-century France and their impact upon later concepts of modern society.
14. An analysis of the changing role of the cemetery not only in France but also more generally in European culture is provided by Richard A. Etlin (1984).
15. For an analysis of the building project and its intended symbolic significance, see Spiro Kostof (1978: 284–89).
16. Claudio Fogu (1996: 327–39) has examined the importance of this event.

17. War cemeteries housed the mortal remains of over 370,000 soldiers. The building of the most important First World War cemetery, Redipuglia, and the propagandistic value it assumed are examined by Patrizia Dogliani (1996).
18. The article, 'Sul sepolcro d'Augusto', was originally published in the *Corriere della Sera*, 26 November 1936.
19. Under the supervision of the archaeologist, Guido Calza, the excavation of the necropolis in Ostia had started in 1925. The narration of Ogetti's journey to Ostia is contained in volume two of *Cose viste* (1951: 795–803). The two volumes are made up of prose pieces published in a variety of newspapers and journals between 1921 and 1943.
20. The programme entailed the destruction of an entire residential district. The 4,000 people that this enterprise displaced were housed in the rapidly constructed *borgate* [working-class suburbs] on the outskirts of the city. For a more detailed analysis on the impact of Mussolini's schemes on the urban environment of Rome, see Cederna (1979), Ciucci (1989: 77–92) and Etlin (1991: 392–94).
21. For a description of the event, which took place on 1 November 1921, see Zanon (1933).
22. The imagined liturgical presence of the dead was not unique to descriptions of the First World War. It is to be found in representations of the conflicts of the 1930s: Mario Appellius, for example, evoked a similar scene when reporting from the front of the Ethiopian war (1937: 100).
23. Carlo Cresti (1986: 48) has suggested that Giorgio De Chirico's paintings of the 1920s and 1930s (especially the celebrated composition 'Il saluto degli Argonauti partenti' [The salute to the departing Argonauts]) reflect the cemetery encroaching on the public space.
24. *Le meraviglie d'Italia* was first printed in 1939. The quotation is taken from the 1993 edition, p. 94.
25. Melossi and Pavarini focus in particular on the period of prison reform which occurred in Tuscany (from 1786 onwards) during the rule of the Grand Duke Pietro Leopoldo.
26. During the 1930s the Fascist state was keen to point to its success in lowering levels of crime. In 1926, 1620 murders were committed, while in 1931 that number stood at 1095. In the same years, the figures for attempted murder were 1575 and 1032 respectively. As Romano Canosa has argued (1991: 296–309), the reduction in the crime rate owed much to the repressive policies of the regime that, in return for the sacrifice of numerous personal freedoms, could ensure the collectivity with a greater level of security. The figures for decreasing crime are given by Canosa (305).
27. Internal exile [confino] was first introduced by the Pica law against brigandage, passed in 1863.
28. A more reflective account, but equally concerned with innovations stemming from the introduction of the New Penal Code, was Riccardo Conti's panorama of the prison service (1938).
29. Grandi reported on the low level of recidivism among reformed juvenile offenders and of their integration into the Campo Dux (1941, 2: 150).
30. Details of the planned carceral city in Rome were outlined in Grandi (1941, 2: 225–27, 250).

31. The narration relies here on a fairly familiar device. Grandi reports the visit of a group of boys from the reform school of Nisida to the opening ceremony of the reformatory in Eboli in June 1939. In their address to the dignitaries and to the inmates of the new institution, the boys describe *themselves* as having been, 'restored to the duties of honesty and love for one's country through hard, intelligent and human work' (1941, 2: 28).
32. Joseph Goebbels was among those official visitors – he travelled to Italy in 1934 – who were singularly impressed by what they saw. The text that recorded his journey took the form of a discussion of the correspondences between Nazism and Fascism, but the structure of the travelogue was clearly evident within the text. His book appeared first in Italian (1936) and all quotations are taken from this edition.
33. In his journey to the cities of the Po valley (first published in 1933), Corrado Alvaro wrote of the need for rapid colonization as not only a means of avoiding overcrowding, but as a way of channelling the naturally aggressive tendencies of the population. For Ruinas (1938: 15), land reclamation was similarly the principal weapon in the battle against urbanization.
34. For a detailed analysis of the construction of Mussolini's new towns and their symbolic function, see Millon (1978) and Ghirardo (1990; 1996).
35. The narration of the visit was first published in the *Corriere della Sera* in February 1933.
36. Gadda wrote, for example, 'I have seen the white clusters of cubes amid the immensity of the land, like flocks placed there by Geometry (sic), ordered by a clear sense of discipline ... and set in motion by a simple grace, by an opportunity bestowed from on high, by a feeling of hope' (1941a: 286).
37. 'Fascism has made us used to seeing miracles on a daily basis in our homeland and not to be surprised by them, to see new towns spring up as if by magic, to see other big or small towns, districts and villages, renovate and embellish themselves and their infrastructure, extend their boundaries', Giuseppe Volta (1937).
38. In conformity with this repeated metaphor, Mussolini was defined as the politician as artist (1936: 41, 67).
39. See Melossi and Pavarini (1981: 90–91). The very title of Grandi's report, *Bonifica umana* [Human reclamation], carried this association.
40. In his article ('Littoria' in *Cose viste*, 2: 406–16) Ojetti noted that the towers of the new towns of Pontinia and Sabaudia will be higher even than the tower of Littoria. For the significance of the towers of Fascist towns, see Ghirardo (1990: 189).
41. A good example is his conversation with a war widow and mother of ten children – the conversation took place at her farm on the fringes of Aprilia (1939: 214–16).
42. Ojetti, *Cose viste*, 2: 413.
43. The degree to which popular support for the project was fuelled by ideological commitment or by the expectation of material gain is one that is considered in the histories of Littoria by Vittorio Cotesta (1988), Riccardo Mariani (1982) and Annibale Folchi (1995). In her work on the new towns in 1930s Italy (2004), Mia Fuller has explored the motivations behind participation in the re-housing project of the state.
44. In her celebratory prose, the God-like Mussolini summons the architect Piacentini, he expresses his will and he sees that the work is done: 'And the last

- day of the month of October of the fourteenth year of the Lictor, as the Duce had said, the Duce arrived and found that everything was ready and in place' (187).
45. For an analysis of the exhibition culture of Fascism, see Jeffrey Schnapp (1992); Marla Stone (1993) and Antonella Russo (1999).
 46. Cecchi described the centre piece of EUR as 'a religious object that can only be celebrated with religious reverence' (1940), quoted in Gentile (1993: 260). For more detailed information on the building of EUR, see Fuller (1996).
 47. See the one page editorial, 'Il Fondatore dell'Impero in Piemonte', *Le Vie d'Italia* (1939).
 48. It is worth quoting Foucault's injunction to struggle against Fascism of the historical variety and 'also the fascism in us all, in our heads and in our everyday behaviour, the fascism that causes us to love power, and to desire the very thing that dominates and exploits us'. From the preface to Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus, Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1983). Quoted in Gary Gutting (1994: 154–55).

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Chapter 4

Narratives of Settlement in Italian East Africa 1936–1941

The different phases of Italy's colonial history are bound together by basic common factors. The seizure of Eritrea in 1890, Giolitti's invasion of Libya in 1911, the conquest of Ethiopia in 1935 were all attempts to affirm Italy's status as a major power akin to France and Britain. They were all part of the 'scramble for Africa', they all diverted attention away from domestic problems and they all tapped into a series of nationalistic myths and fantasies. Elements of continuity between liberal and Fascist Italy were evident in the type of legislation adopted in the overseas territories as well as in the kind of repressive strategies that were employed to deal with widespread resistance to Italian rule. The operation to 're-conquer' Libya began in the wake of the First World War, but it was not officially concluded until 1932. Each of the periods of Italian expansion in Africa gave birth to its own slogans, its own propaganda and its own forms of writing, creating a substantial corpus of colonial literature. By the 1890s a number of colonial magazines existed and the publishing house, Treves, ran a series of richly illustrated books entitled 'Viaggi Africani'.¹ The Futurists contributed famously to the celebration of the war in Libya, but it was Mussolini's Italy that saw the most significant production of writing on colonial themes. Throughout the 1930s a vast amount of books and articles were published on the nature of Italian interest or involvement in Ethiopia. Such writings did not merely reflect the changing political realities of the time, they formulated and disseminated ideas on the country and its population, they commented on and helped to further the imperial policies of the regime.

Texts written on the eve of invasion sought precedents to Italy's anticipated colonial adventure either by tracing a genealogy of explorers

to the region or by evoking the success and failure of the earlier imperial policies of Crispi and Giolitti.² They claimed to offer verifiable information on the natural resources of Ethiopia that could be exploited in the wake of conquest.³ They offered a range of justifications for Italian intervention: evoking Haile Selassie's empire as a barbarous locality; accusing the ruling élite of perpetuating slavery and of tyrannizing the different peoples over which it governed; characterizing the emperor as an incompetent usurper, whose attempts to westernize his empire had succeeded only in destabilizing his country and endangering the Italian colonies of Eritrea and Somalia. The trope of Ethiopia as a dying nation was repeated obsessively as was the view that the country had created nothing of value over the centuries of its existence. The reader of any text written before October 1935 was, finally, not allowed to forget that the empire was founded on the massacre of Italian soldiers.

Concerning the conquest of Ethiopia, Angelo Del Boca has written of the regime successfully establishing a 'factory of consensus' which left no area of society free from propaganda: as Italian troops invaded Ethiopia, schoolchildren followed their advance in class; giant maps were erected in the squares of Italian towns; radio broadcasts bombarded listeners with information (Del Boca 1996: 423), the photographic units of the Italian army produced a flood of images which, under the guidance of the Ministry for the Press and Propaganda, washed over the country (Palma 1999: 26–27).⁴ Articles examining different aspects of the Ethiopian question appeared in national dailies and in journals like *Razza e civiltà* (the journal of the Ministry for Internal Affairs), *L'Azione Coloniale* (the mouthpiece of the Istituto Coloniale Fascista), Giuseppe Bottai's *Critica Fascista* or Margherita Sarfatti's *Gerarchia*. From July 1936 onwards the bibliographical section of the *Rivista delle Colonie* included a section entitled 'Impero d'Etiopia' that listed, as a general rule, between 30 and 45 entries. One commentator expressed the widely held belief that imperial representations served the purpose of 'preparing, commenting on and following Italian expansionist policy'.⁵ Between April and July 1936 the Roman syndicate of writers and authors organized an exhibition with the title 'Il libro coloniale del tempo fascista' [the colonial book in the Fascist era]. Over 100,000 visitors (the exact figure was 100,340) saw the exhibition.⁶

A great deal of writing was published on the military invasion of Ethiopia.⁷ Works were written by journalists, soldiers and by Fascist hierarchs who participated in the military operation. Pavolini, Starace and Bottai all wrote accounts of their war experiences (Starace 1936; Pavolini 1937; Bottai 1940). Interpretations of the event spread across other genres, especially film. Corrado D'Errico's *Il cammino degli eroi*

[The March of the Heroes] appeared in 1936, *La battaglia dell'Ambra arcadan* [The Battle of Ambra arcadan] was first shown in 1936, *Ore di guerra nel cielo africano* in 1941. Most accounts were extreme masculinist versions of colonial discourse which frequently deployed Futurist techniques to glorify violence and the ideal type of the Blackshirt (Appelius 1937: 54). The structure that such accounts followed was simple: they recounted the preparation for war, the war itself, and the final victory. Within that narrative, the foreign soil underwent a series of metamorphoses: it became a metaphor for the palingenesis of Italy; the site where the history of Italy and the history of Fascism would merge; the place where the 'spirito della patria' [spirit of the homeland] could be sensed and where the presence of fallen Italian soldiers could be felt; the mythical, promised land that the Duce had pledged his people; the site that cancelled the memory of the Treaty of Versailles and which established Italy as a great power.⁸ Such texts revealed a constant both of Fascism and of its imperial project, namely, the elevation of force to a guiding principle. The notion of the individual subject was lost within the rhetorical construction of the Fascist nation, people emerged as individuals only insofar as they carried, to an exceptional degree, the perceived qualities of the collective. The army of Haile Selassie, by contrast, was universally represented as a sadistic hoard, intent on destruction. It became the legitimate, dehumanized target for one massacre after another (Appelius 1937: 68).

It is not, however, on the texts that were produced either before or during the invasion of Ethiopia that I wish to concentrate. My analysis centres instead on the written accounts of journeys to the empire in the wake of its conquest. Several texts of this kind were written by influential correspondents of the time: Orio Vergani and Ciro Poggiali travelled to Ethiopia for the *Corriere della Sera*.⁹ Both journalists collected their articles into the form of travel texts: Vergani's book was entitled *La via nera: viaggio in Etiopia da Massaua a Mogadiscio* [The Black Path: Journey in Ethiopia from Massawa to Mogadishu] (Vergani 1938), Poggiali's, *Agli Albori dell'Impero* [At the Dawn of Empire] (Poggiali 1938). Other texts were written by occasional travellers to the empire, like Alba Felter Sartori, who journeyed from Dire Dawa to Gimma in order to collect souvenirs of the war as well as artefacts of indigenous culture (Felter Sartori 1940); the well-known writer of colonial literature, Mario Dei Gaslini, wrote several accounts of journeys to different regions in Eritrea and Ethiopia (Dei Gaslini 1938; 1941); the convinced Fascist ideologue, Alessandro Melchiori, published his view of the empire in *Il nostro impero coloniale* [Our Colonial Empire] (Melchiori 1938). His text was written for an imaginary youth, but all the texts of the period addressed

a readership avid for information on the implications of the word ‘impero’. Notable perceptions of the construction of the new empire from the outside were provided by the postface to Evelyn Waugh’s *Waugh in Abyssinia* (1936); by the German journalist, Louise Diel’s narration of her journey to Africa, translated into English under the title *Behold Our New Empire* (1939a);¹⁰ and, from a very different perspective, by Ladislav Sava’s eyewitness account of the arrival of Italian troops in Addis Ababa (1940).

My approach considers these writings as a recognizably similar corpus of works which fulfilled a role within the drive of the regime to foster an increasingly widespread colonial consciousness. The empire, in its initial stages of construction, was a military creation in the process of becoming a civil state, and my reading of written accounts of journeys to Africa Orientale Italiana (AOI) is intended to show how this transition was perceived in the various travel texts. The chapter examines how other narratives (the progress of civilization, the arrival in an ideal space) were woven into the principal discourse of settlement. More importantly, the aim is to indicate the range of subject positions that colonists’ viewed themselves as performing within a highly gendered and racially hierarchical system. The analysis aims to show how statements made within the writing converged with those made in other media (such as photography and film) as well as with those made from other institutional sites.¹¹ In focussing largely on the written work of journalists like Ciro Poggiali or Orio Vergani, the chapter is an analysis of the impressions of those whose job it was to present an idea of Italy’s newest territory to a waiting public. While what follows does not claim to address the issue of how official perceptions of the Italian presence in Africa were received at the time, it does explore the persistence of such narratives in written memories of settlement in Ethiopia and Eritrea.¹²

Narratives of Settlement

In all travel accounts written during the brief life of the Italian empire, language that had previously been used to define the progress of the war was translated into the supposedly new atmosphere of peace.¹³ The image of reclamation, so central to Fascism’s earlier Battle for Wheat and its draining of the Pontine Marshes, was continually deployed to suggest the struggle to extract the potential from the actual. The recovery of the Ethiopian land surface re-enacted the Fascist recovery of the nation. The external colony was founded on the same basis as the internal colony.¹⁴ If veterans of the First World War were encouraged to resettle in the newly reclaimed area south of Rome, then veterans of the Ethiopian

campaign were offered, through the agency of the *Opera Nazionale Combattenti* and other official and highly active bodies such as the *Ente Romagna d'Etiopia*, incentives to settle in East Africa.¹⁵ All visitors to the 'new reality' expressed a sense of wonder at the vastness of the terrain to be colonized, at how many times it would enclose the Italian peninsula. They repeated the sensation of arriving in an ideal world that awaited Italian expertise to be fully exploited. Their writing was permeated with a sense of having realized the slogans ('un posto al sole' [a place in the sun] or 'lo spazio vitale' [living space]) of both Fascist and earlier nationalist propaganda.¹⁶ In the opening pages to his travelogue, Poggiali asserted that the earthly paradise was to be found in the *Old Testament*, not in Ethiopia. But his apparent denial of the comparison served to reinforce its validity. Throughout his book he emphasized the work that was needed so that Italian East Africa could become 'a limitless land of plenty'; the title of one of his chapters was, 'obvious riches'; he discovered sights that were 'beyond description'. Most writers on empire drew metaphors from biblical situations and, as the titles of so many of their publications suggested, they saw themselves as present at the dawn of a new world. The concept of the arrival in an ideal space had other ramifications. In Melchiori's prose the Italian appropriation of Africa was a recovery of the nation's Roman past, just as in Mussolini's famous declaration of empire (from Piazza Venezia on 9 May 1936) the occupation of Ethiopia was evoked as the re-appearance of ancient Rome.

There were, however, more disturbing connections between the colonization of Ethiopia and other incidents or metaphors of reclamation. The new settlements of the Pontine Marshes were founded in areas that were largely uninhabited, while the newly conquered land surface of Ethiopia was anything but scarcely populated (Ipsen 1996: 120). Yet, the metaphor that occurred time and again in the officially sanctioned accounts of the period, was that of the occupation of an *empty* space. The metaphor was itself part of a fantasy of boundless, extensive possessions. Poggiali quoted Graziani, to the effect that the patient and arduous work of the Italians must take place: 'su macerie, spesso sul nulla' [on ruins, often on nothing] (Poggiali 1938: 5). In his writing, Vergani liked to present himself as the first inhabitant of the new land: he crossed uncharted territory, he attempted to find places which existed on the map but not in reality, he came across various scientific expeditions charting the new land.¹⁷ He affirmed: 'È difficile capire e far capire questa semplice cosa: "Qui non c'era nulla. Non c'era che terra: un pezzo di pianeta."' [It is difficult to understand and to make others understand this simple fact: 'Here there was nothing. There was only earth, a piece of the planet] (Vergani 1938: 48).

Though the framing of Ethiopia as a space where the return to the land could occur may have been predicated on a false analogy, it exerted huge appeal over the agrarian classes of Mussolini's regime. From May 1936 the Ministry for Colonial Affairs was inundated with requests for farmland. Most Italian settlers in AOI were motivated by the idea of escaping unemployment at home and of making money quickly abroad. The willingness of large numbers of people to apply for plots of arable land in Africa demonstrated the articulation of an idea of empire with basic concerns and aspirations and in Ipsen's view served to maintain a degree of popular consensus for the regime (Ipsen 1996: 135). Yet, whatever its power as propaganda, the idea of an earthly paradise outstripped actual possibilities. In the wake of conquest, the state discovered the extent of its failure to gather adequate information on the resources of its new colony and its overestimation of the area that could be transformed into farmland (Del Boca 1982: 199–211). During the Italian occupation of Ethiopia only 854 families were able to start farming in the colony (Ipsen 1996: 133). The emphasis of most of the oral testimonies of settlement collected by Irma Taddia is on the delusion suffered by immigrants to AOI (most of whom worked either as workers within government projects or as traders supplying goods), on their failure to adapt to the harsh realities of life in Africa and on their applications to return to Italy without having acquired wealth or enhanced social status (Taddia 1988).

Emphasis on the fertility of the newly conquered soil encouraged agrarian colonization, but recorded journeys to the empire were keen to nourish other narratives. They helped to present the new empire not as the playground of the aristocracy or the bourgeoisie but as the 'domain of the proletariat' or 'factory of the worker', capable of providing a permanent answer to the problem of emigration that had been felt so acutely by Italy at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century.¹⁸ Travellers to Ethiopia acted as prospectors who saw mineral resources waiting to be exploited or in the process of being mined (Passagre 1936: 629; Dei Gaslini 1938: 184; Poggiali 1938: 291). On his return to occupied Ethiopia, Evelyn Waugh was unreserved in his praise for the achievements of the Italian workforce, contrasting their notion of colonization with the kind of territorial expansion that Britain and France had witnessed. His apologia for 'the empire of work' went on to compare AOI with conquest of the western states of America (Waugh 1936). Writing from Italy, Elio Vittorini argued that Ethiopia, having been conquered for the working classes should be used for their benefit, he argued that the colony offered the ground for a 'totalitarian corporatist experience' (Vittorini 1936). The short period of Italian rule, however,

witnessed only the first step in the exploitation of Ethiopian resources: the building or consolidation of aspects of the colony's infrastructure. Between 1935 and 1941 over 20,000 kilometres of roads were constructed. The very possibility of travel was afforded by these roads and all visitors to Ethiopia celebrated, often through metaphor, the rapidity of their appearance. The new roads were presented as the giver of life, they would lead from the Alps to the Indian Ocean; they would conquer time and space, they would be the 'backbone' of the empire, they led from war into peace, they transformed the empire into a living organism: 'nella strada è la vita' [the road brings life], 'via-vita'. They were the physical evidence of the trajectory which the Italian presence in Africa was following, its mission of modernization (Ben-Ghiat 1996: 126–28). Vergani wrote of the road between Asmara and Addis Ababa: '1090 chilometri. Un'opera di ciclopi, un'impresa da far impallidire i costruttori delle Piramidi ... Strada italissima a cinquemila chilometri dalla Patria' [1,090 kilometres. A titanic enterprise, one that would make the builders of the pyramids pale ... A perfectly Italian road 5,000 kilometres from Italy] (Vergani 1938: 37).

The road was also figured as the means through which the benefits of empire would be made tangible, or the means through which the earthly paradise would become a reality. Fundamentally, the newly constructed roads provided the ground for the dynamic which structured all accounts on empire, the translation of different aspects of Italian culture into East Africa. When they make their gradual appearance in 'the new reality', the objects of ordinary life are invested with magical properties. In the words of Vergani: 'the miracle of work, the miracle of the first stirrings of trade, the miracle of fresh bread, of a clean sheet' (Vergani 1938: 48). The transposition of aspects of Italian society transforms the ordinary into the miraculous, or, as Felter Sartori put it, 'every step towards normality contains something prodigious' (1940: 35). The newly formed communities have a religious valuation of themselves and the myth of palingenesis, that is so much a part of texts that represent the conquest of Ethiopia, becomes the myth of genesis. As the importation of goods from Italy is described, another narrative becomes apparent: the material products of Italian society are the visible signs of an abstract process of civilization. Not only is their appearance miraculous, but they exert a miraculous transformation over those whose lives they touch. The material and the spiritual were woven together in ways that were both earnest and absurd. Augusta Perricone Viola was to write: 'Quegli indigeni ricevono ormai il pane italiano, comprano il pane italiano, si nutrono del pane italiano e si comunicano così spiritualmente, quasi in un rito, nella nostra civiltà rigenerandosi' [the natives now receive Italian

bread, this bread provides them with nourishment and they are able to communicate spiritually, as if in a religious ceremony, with our civilization and to be regenerated by such contact] (Perricone Violà 1936: 48).

In the architecture of concepts that structured perceptions of East Africa, the notion of civilization was fundamental. Yet, the concept served different purposes according to the context of its articulation: it could act as one of the principal tropes of legitimisation; it could refer to the work of transformation in which every settler played a part; it could stand as the goal to which progress was directed; it could be used as a metonym for European society or, more specifically, for the culture of Fascist Italy, 'la civiltà fascista'. If Mussolini purported to have reawoken the spirit of ancient Rome after centuries of decadence, then the Italian presence in Africa (as observers like Waugh were prepared to testify) represented the expansion of this ancient, imperial spirit. Melchiori used the notion of civilization indiscriminately to signify Italy both of the ancient past and the present, writing, for example: 'where Italy has arrived, so has civilization' (Melchiori 1938: 41). With more sinister implications, the notion of civilization displayed a closeness to (and sometimes an inseparability with) a concept of race, where particular mental attributes supposedly corresponded to hereditary biological types. The term 'civiltà' could thus act as a metaphysical boundary that separated one ethnic community from another.

Unsurprisingly, the term was used to reiterate the cultural characteristics of a group deemed to be 'civilized'. Such characteristics could be as basic as the notion of time. Visitors to the empire often affirmed a link between themselves and their readers by assuming a shared investment in the march of 'progress' that they witnessed. Diel used the speed of the transformation of Ethiopia as the refrain of her travelogue, while all Italian commentators insisted on a division between Ethiopia's past, under the rule of Menelich and Haile Selassie, and its supposedly renovated present. Their assertion was that time in the indigenous culture was unconnected with progress, while for the colonizers it measured the pace of change. In the words of Poggiali, 'Di lì è entrato il progresso, ossia quel vario fermento di vita innovatrice e propulsiva che abbiamo recato noi' [Thus progress has begun, in other words that multi-faceted fervour of innovative and propulsive life which we have brought with us] (Poggiali 1938: 309). The conviction that colonizers and colonized experienced time in ways that were antithetical accentuated the division between the two. But the writing on empire was repetitive. Frequently derivative, the imagery on which it relied was often extracted from religious sources. The opposition between past and

present was, by metaphorical transfer, habitually expressed in terms of luminosity: Ethiopia, before conquest, was a country 'immersed in centuries of darkness' (Poggiali 1938: 333); the action of Italian settlers 'awoke' the soil; the empire as a whole became a beacon challenging metropolitan Italy to achieve similar feats; the 'imperial reality' shone on the daily life of Italy (Melchiori 1938: 3). For Felter Sartori, light was associated both with civilization and with sacrifice: 'La luce che si diffonde dal sacrificio di tutti brillerà nei secoli coll'impronta che ha lasciato la civiltà' [The light which emanates from the common sacrifice will shine across centuries with the trace that civilization has left] (Felter Sartori 1940: 139).

Colonizers and Colonized

As they were constructed rhetorically and as they were en-acted physically, imperial narratives sought to impose subject-positions on both the colonizers and the colonized: such subject-positions were open to a limited degree of negotiation, but they could not be avoided. The visitors to the empire indulged in the celebration of ideal types, they represented figures who served as models for admiration and emulation, living embodiments of the 'prestige of the race', 'missionaries of italianità' (Dei Gaslini 1938: 185). As Vergani moved between Asmara and Addis Ababa, he witnessed the transformation of Italian troops into a new and powerful workforce: for the 'legionaries of work', the gun had been replaced by the spade. As well as emphasizing their encounters with modified versions of the same archetype, writers and journalists who visited the empire also presented a series of portraits of Italians. The gallery included men setting up shops by the road and families that had recently emigrated: all were examples of those who, in the words of Mussolini, were *worthy* of the empire.¹⁹ Frequently, the members of the settler community were characterized by comparisons, whether explicit or not, with the ancient Romans. Most travellers remarked on the appearance of statues of Mussolini that lined the newly constructed roads [Figure 4.1], while in her description of Graziani (viceroy of Ethiopia 1936–37), Felter Sartori relied on a paradigm of the heroic commander:

Quando ho visto il Generale Graziani per la prima volta da vicino ho capito la sua volontà ferrea ... Molto alto, spalle quadrate, viso angoloso, sguardo che va dritto a frugare dove vuole ... Ha tutti i caratteri del condottiero. (Felter Sartori 1940: 37).

[When I saw General Graziani for the first time close up, I understood his iron will ... He is a very tall man with square shoulders, angular features and a stare that cuts straight through you ... He has all the attributes of the commander.]

In suggesting a likeness between modern and ancient imperialists, the travel accounts of the time hinted at wider discursive patterns. The association between the present and the ancient past became increasingly obsessive in the late 1930s. Carmine Gallone's film, *Scipione L'Africano* [Scipio Africanus] (1937), derived its inspiration and its purpose from making a series of unobvious parallels between Scipio's suppression of Carthage and Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia. In the film, shown not only in cinemas but also in schools, the ancient world served as a mirror in which the contemporary audience could see an ideal reflection of its collective identity. In the written accounts of journeys to AOI, the resonances of the Roman Empire were accompanied by definitions of contemporary Italians as 'dominatori' [dominators].²⁰ The repetition of the word pointed to the cultural and racial hierarchy at the basis of the Italian presence in Africa. It suggested that the individual consciousness was part of what Angelo Piccioli, head of the Ufficio Studi of the Ministry of Colonial Affairs, called: 'the ordering, creating and dominating spirit of the Metropolis' (Piccioli 1936).

In the few years of its existence, Mussolini's empire sought to externalize both its sense of power and identity. As early as 1936 a plan was ready for the rebuilding of Addis Ababa not only as an Italian city in Africa, but as a Fascist city divided into zones according to the social status of its future inhabitants and the rhythm of their daily activities. The visual expression of the imperial values of the new ruling élite would be provided by the monumental, if funereal, structures of the most influential architect of the late 1930s, Marcello Piacentini (Fuller 1996). If the colonists' vision of themselves was reaffirmed by the modelling of their physical environment, then most written accounts of journeys to the empire used the figure of personification to describe the appearance of 'new' cities. In Vergani's prose, Addis Ababa, like the empire itself, grew anthropomorphically in stature and confidence (Vergani 1938: 82–84); equally, in the writing of Poggiali, Piccioli and Feltr Sartori, the city was evoked as testimony of the creative energies of Italian community. In its evocations, the city (and by extension the collectivity) emerged as an object of worship, and the act of living in the newly created colony imposed its own strict morality, founded upon discipline, order and extreme regularity. The belief that settlers in AOI were in the avant-garde of the Fascist project was one that Louise Diel was fond of reiterating:

Nothing is more gratifying than to see how people gladly suffer all manner of hardships because they steadfastly believe in the importance of the tasks that they have been summoned specially to fulfil. Fascist happiness has a different appearance to *bourgeois* contentment. But it is a fine thing when both conceptions are combined. (Diel 1939a: 138)



Figure 4.1. Bust of Mussolini, Adwa (Poggiali 1971: 1). Reprinted with the permission of the *Corriere della Sera*.

The tasks that Diel spoke of involved a clear separation between men and women. At all levels of its functioning, the imperial system had obvious gender implications. Of the hundreds of thousands of Italians in AOI, most were men: in Taddia's words, the empire was 'un mondo al maschile' [a masculine world] (Taddia 1988: 41). The wives and families of the first settlers were supposed to journey to Ethiopia in a second phase, made difficult by the slowness of building projects and by continuing armed resistance. Courses were offered to women by the provincial centres of the Istituto Fascista dell'Africa Italiana (I.F.A.I.), in collaboration with the local Fasci femminili, on how to begin life in the colonies and to cope with some of its demanding realities. From 1938 the *Partito Nazionale Fascista* began a system of training camps for women: by 1939, 100,000 women had taken part in the scheme (Palma 1999: 170–71). In one of the pieces that he wrote for *Le Vie d'Italia*, Carlo Emilio Gadda described the courses offered throughout Lombardy by the I.F.A.I. His description focused on the 'mission' which Italian women were called to perform, on the 'faith' which women would have to display and on the family 'traditions' which preparation for life in Ethiopia drew.²¹ The very existence of preparatory courses indicated hurried plans to increase the emigration of women to the colonies, motivated by the fear of a growing population of children of mixed race. Writing for *L'Azione Coloniale*, Anna Maria Galli (1937) even suggested that orphanages for girls could be transferred to the colonies where, in time, they could serve as a source for the wives of colonists and civil servants.

Both the preparation for and the arrival of Italian women, together with the consequent polarization of gender roles, were amplified in written accounts of journeys to AOI. In a particularly grotesque passage of *Agli Albori dell'Impero*, Poggiali described the necessity of Italian women making their 'prestigious appearance' before 'l'altra femminilità' (the term he used to refer to Italian or French prostitutes) became established (Poggiali 1938: 524). The few accounts written by women of journeys to the empire did not rely on the same crude typologies, but they openly reinforced the notion of colonialism as an essentially male activity in which women performed a secondary role – solving practical realities, providing moral support, creating the domestic space. Women like Alba Felter Sartori or Louise Diel spoke explicitly for the imperial project: they defined themselves as occupying a role within a system that privileged a masculine élite.²² In her meeting with one group of Italian officers, Felter Sartori proudly declaimed: 'I am the daughter of Felter' (1940: 20). Yet, the interest of the texts lies precisely in the ways in which they construct their narrator. Most travel writing is egocentric and in the writings of Felter Sartori and Diel the narrator is represented as the

protagonist of a kind of adventure travel, surviving one strange circumstance after another and delighting in the sensation of assuming the role of symbol. As the first Italian woman to arrive in one outlying district, Felter Sartori writes:

Quante volte nell'Impero ho desiderato di essere bella, molto bella e giovane, per portare a questi soldati che in me hanno rivisto dopo anni la donna d'Italia, l'ideale delle creature she sognano. (Felter Sartori 1940: 68)

[While in the empire I have often wished to be young and beautiful so that I could represent, for the soldiers who see in me the Italian woman they have not seen for years, the feminine ideal that they dream about.]

The categories according to which Felter Sartori represents her consciousness, the emphasis which she places on seeing and on being seen are shared by Diel. Both writers participate temporarily in the lifestyle of the colonies, they experience the hardships and the pleasures of the new environment, they suggest that they have been transformed by the length of their stay in Ethiopia and the experiences which they undergo.²³ Felter Sartori describes herself as a 'true colonist' (1940: 35), while Louise Diel speaks of 'growing African' and of being 'bitten by the fever of building and creating' (1939a: 148). Diel is at pains to document her observations with a wealth of statistical information, to instruct her readers on how to apprehend the unfamiliar, and to supply practical directions. Her view of the formation of the 'Italian Colonial Woman' is informed by stereotypical notions of the Italian national character and by an undisguised and unproblematic association between women and the home. At one point, she observes: 'That is the way of Italian women; if family circumstances are satisfactorily regulated, they are happy and contented as a matter of course. Nothing is more foreign to them than the type of American girl who dreams only of fashions, flirtations and beauty queens' (Diel 1939a: 145).

Any examination of how the settler population is represented leads necessarily to the question of the construction of the colonial subject in discourse. The travel texts of the period prove a valuable resource in addressing this question: they display the perceptual categories and the patterns of inference which determine the colonizers' view of the colonized; they indicate the desires, investments and projections that are central to the settlers' existence among the indigenous population of the new empire. Above all, they reveal the limitations of the imperial rhetoric of which they, the travel texts, are part. Afraid of the possibility of a growing mixed race population and keen to promote the notion of the Italian people as 'un popolo dominatore' [a nation of dominators], Mussolini and his Minister for Colonial Affairs, Alessandro Lessona,

promoted racial segregation at every level of Italian East Africa. In the Fascist version of apartheid, districts of all major towns were reserved exclusively for white settlers, conjugal relations between Italians and Ethiopians were criminalized, collective activities were prohibited (Goglia 1988; Sòrgoni 1998). Despite claims that the Italian presence in Africa was legitimated by a civilizing mission, the relationship between settlers and subjects was organized along strictly hierarchical lines (euphemistically designated as collaboration) that allowed no passage from the lower reaches to the higher. Writing for *L'Italia coloniale*, Edoardo Zavattari gave a broad account of the distinctions that the new colonial administration intended to make, stating that Italians would be at the head of every working party or organization and that Ethiopians would have simply to obey. The division of labour would thus be 'definite, unmistakable and absolute' (Zavattari 1936: 66).²⁴

The policy of racial segregation pursued in the empire was part of a wider attempt to encourage a sense of racial consciousness among Italians, an attempt which provoked a deluge of publications and conferences, and which was to culminate in the promulgation of the anti-Semitic laws of 1938. The legitimization of the hierarchical system and the conception of the world as a series of different races competing for domination depended on the support of a number of distinguished figures from different scientific disciplines. Lidio Cipriani, the leading anthropologist, was in the forefront of a drive to demonstrate the racial inferiority of the indigenous population of Ethiopia.²⁵ The texts which he produced in the 1930s were intended to prove that the population of Ethiopia was in irreversible physical decline and that, if left to itself, it would never be able to exploit the immense resources of the country (Cipriani 1935: 917–18; 1936: 177–221). Cipriani's willingness to tailor his research to the needs of the regime was indicative of the direction which anthropology followed in the late 1930s (Goglia 1988; Sòrgoni 1998). If anthropology echoed and supported the racist orientation of the regime, then so did the travel accounts of the time. In the texts of Felter Sartori, Diel, Vergani or Poggiali, the people of Ethiopia live within a state of primitive naturalness (Poggiali 1938: 512); they are seen as occasionally ferocious (Vergani 1938: 126); they need to acquire a sense of knowledge and conscience (Felter Sartori 1940: 31); 'they are insensitive to physical and mental pain, and they know few feelings of joy' (Diel 1939a: 51). In the words of Mario Dei Gaslini: 'Le popolazioni etiopiche sono definite dalla loro ignoranza, dai loro costumi barbarici, dalla loro inerzia, dalla loro diffidenza e dal completo primitivismo delle loro idee e dei loro sentimenti' [The people of Ethiopia are defined by their ignorance, by their barbarous customs, by their inertia, by their

diffidence and by the completely primitive nature of their ideas and their feelings] (Dei Gaslini 1938: 178).²⁶ Beyond their various ascriptions of savagery, the many visitors to empire documented the extent to which the hierarchical colonial system was, in their view, accepted by Italy's newly acquired subject population: Vergani observed Ethiopians giving Roman salutes and gratefully accepting the advantages of Italian rule [Figure 4.2]; Diel witnessed schoolchildren reciting the life story of the Duce in Italian. Making an association between Ethiopians and children, Felter Sartori marvelled at the transformatory potential of the army: 'they take a semi barbarous individual and transform him into a soldier' (Felter Sartori 1940: 32). Similarly, Poggiali referred to the activities of the Italian workforce to find an example of the tutelage of the 'uncivilized man' by the 'civilized man' (Poggiali 1940: 520).²⁷

To see Ethiopians fulfilling a role at the lower end of the imperial administration was an aggressive identification based on an analogy between the subject and the land surface – as a space, that is, which could be occupied or dominated according to a concept of internal colonization. The discursive and photographic representations of Ethiopians working efficiently within the new order were predicated, further, on the annihilation of Ethiopian culture. In the official publications of the time, the original inhabitants of Ethiopia appeared as silent figurations whose individual gestures were isolated and seized upon. At best, existing social structures were described as an obstacle to be overcome: referring to the sum of indigenous customs, Vergani offered the crude, but common, opinion, that the major obstacle to Italian colonization was the 'evil crust known as Abyssinian civilization' (1938: 75).²⁹

If we take the model that Homi Bhabha establishes in 'The other question' (1994), then the emphasis on the gradual incorporation of native Ethiopians into the Fascist economy can also be interpreted as a narcissistic identification, where the colonizer sees the colonized as a mirror in which elements of the metropolitan culture are reflected and/or admired. Arriving in one village, Vergani wrote:

Sono l'Italiano. Non devo dimenticarlo ... Sono, nella loro fantasia, una creatura grande e misteriosa, il guerriero, il medico, il vendicatore dei torti, ... l'uomo che segue in cento, in duecento, in mille quando cammina (Vergani 1938: 120).

[I am the Italian. I must not forget it ... In their imagination, I am a great and mysterious creature, a warrior, a doctor, a man who sets wrongs to right ... A man who, when he moves, is followed by one hundred, two hundred, one thousands others.]

As is so often the case in accounts of journeys through empire, the writer of this passage is presented literally as the emblem of a collective identity. Correspondingly, the colonized are posited as the audience of the Italian

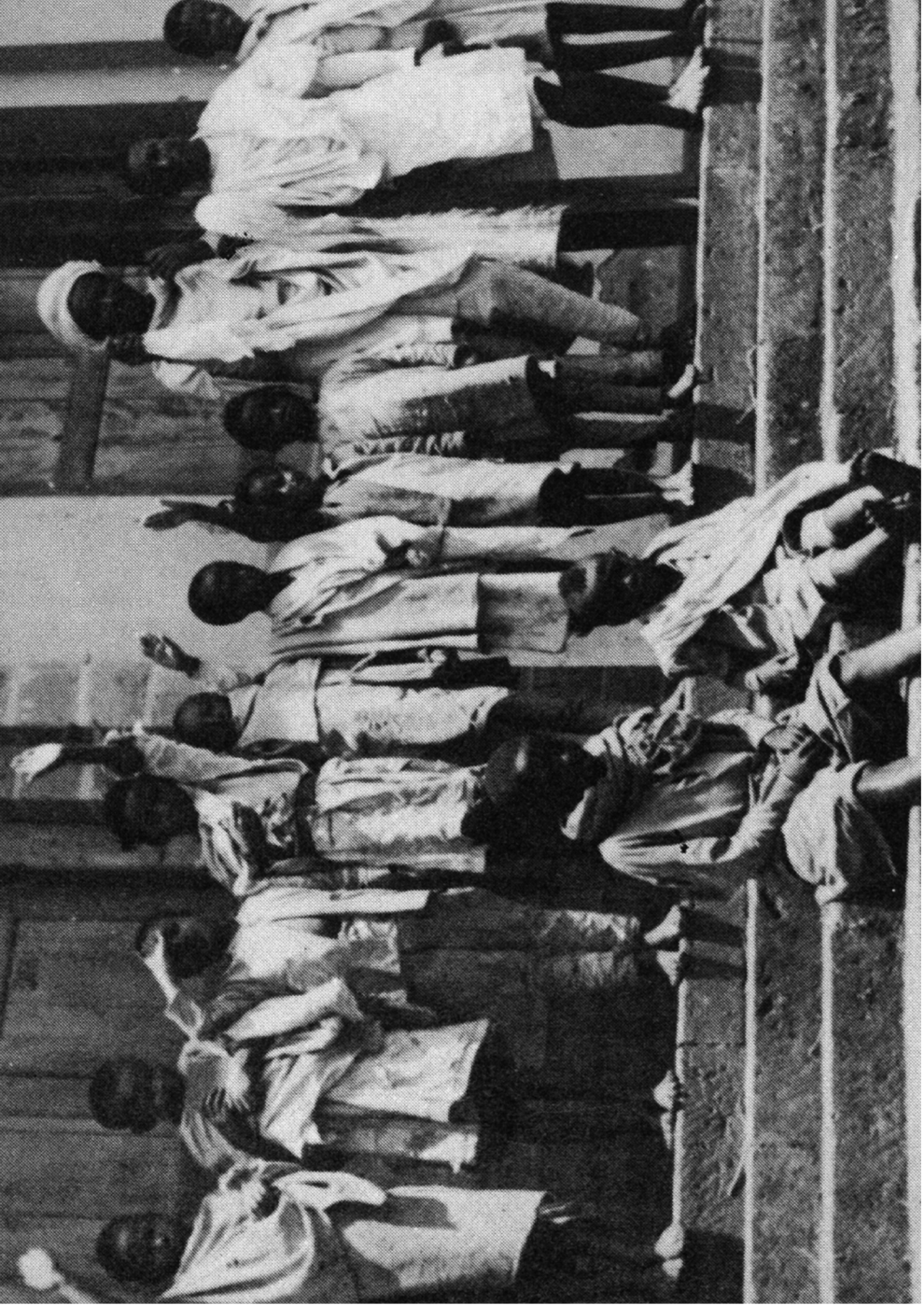


Figure 4.2. Picture of Fascist salute (Poggiali 1971: 32). Reprinted with the permission of the *Corriere della Sera*.

performance, as the shadow able to imitate (imperfectly) the actions of the colonists. At the same time as they ascribed barbarous desires and responses to the indigenous people, the various travellers to AOI liked to detect the appreciation of imperial behaviour. An element of projection is not far from the surface in Felter Sartori's observation: 'Ho osservato che gli indigeni tutti hanno un concetto elevatissimo della forza e del coraggio' [I have observed that the natives hold force and courage in extremely high regard] (Felter Sartori 1940: 30).³⁰ The vision of the colonizer was unilateral, yet it was presented as reciprocal.

The ambivalence of the identification is compounded if, following Bhabha, the colonial subject is seen as inscribed not only within an economy of domination and power, but also as within an economy of pleasure and desire. In the pre-Fascist colonization of Eritrea it was common for Italian male settlers and soldiers to have long-standing relationships with Eritrean women, their 'madame'. The institution of 'madamismo' went hand in hand with the production of photographs of women that served to fuel the orientalist fantasy of the colony as a place of unrestrained sexuality [Figure 4.3] and of the colonized body as part of the imperial spoils (Campassi and Segà 1983; Del Boca 1996).³¹ In his history of the Italian presence in Africa, Del Boca refers extensively to the sexual motivation of many of the Italian colonists. That motivation forms the theme of Ennio Flaiano's well-known novel on the Ethiopian campaign, *Tempo di uccidere* [A Time to Kill] (1947). In spite of the administration's attempt to enforce racial segregation and to solve what was perceived as the problem of the 'meticcio' by outlawing cohabitation between Italians and Ethiopians, inter-racial sexual contact proliferated.³² Complete segregation may have remained a racist fantasy, but, as Sörgoni's work demonstrates, the relationship of domination of one ethnic group by another was amply expressed by the kind of sexual relationships that male colonizers had with colonized women. Despite the official ban, 'madamismo' continued in most administrative zones of AOI, while a highly developed system of prostitution developed throughout the empire (Pankhurst 1974).

Accounts of journeys to the empire endeavoured to portray a complete coincidence between the policy of segregation as stipulated and as followed. They were either silent concerning the widespread phenomenon of 'madamismo' or they denied its existence. Poggiali, for example, declared that the policy of racial separation was pursued with 'absolute intransigence in the field of sexual contact' (Poggiali 1938: 521).³³ Declarations of this kind were generally accompanied by a series of derogatory references to children of mixed race: Poggiali referred consistently to the 'evil' effects of miscegenation. Though the repetition

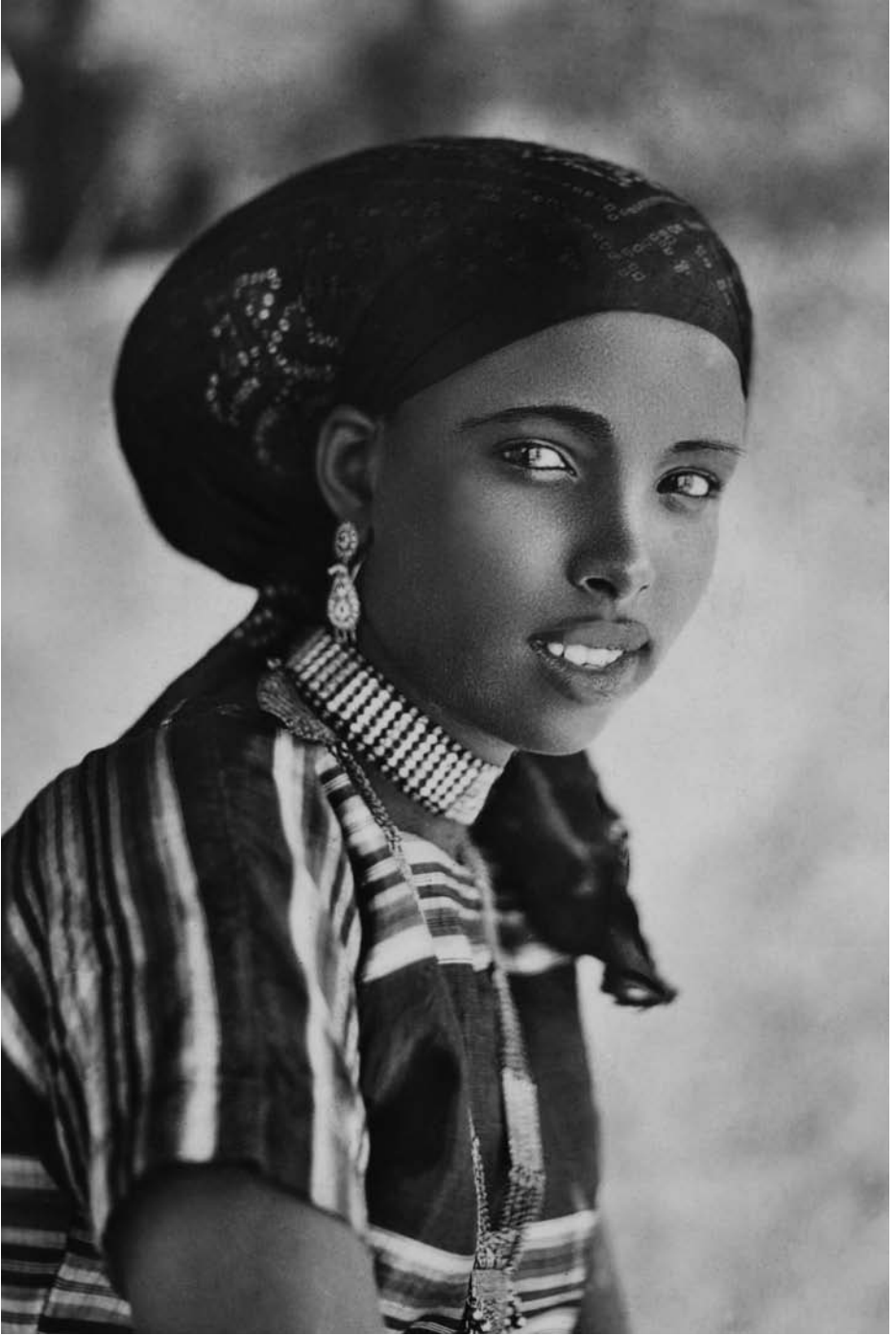


Figure 4.3. An Ethiopian woman, photo by A. Parodi, circa 1935. Reprinted with the permission of the Alinari Archives, Florence.

of such injurious statements was an integral part of the campaign of discrimination designed to discourage inter-racial sexuality, the travel texts were significant representations of their time in that they expressed a tension between desire and its denial. The texts insidiously imposed a series of ambivalent projections on the colonial body. In the many photographs reproduced by the various texts, Ethiopian women were often the object of the onlookers' gaze. Most male commentators alluded to the female body through familiar devices such as the exaggerated description of women's clothing. When visiting Harar, Poggiali wrote of the 'supreme elegance' of the women's dress, of the fine texture of their hair and of the 'sinuous procacity of their person' (Poggiali 1938: 318). His observations on the women of Harar were echoed by his fellow correspondent of the *Corriere della Sera*, Virgilio Lilli:

Nerissime di pelle, esse portano vesti, scarpe e veli viola, gialli, rossi, bordati di larghe strisce blu e arancione, punteggiati di pisellini neri. La sottana s'allunga fino allo stinco, ma non costituisce il pezzo forte del vestito; non è che una specie di soprabito. Perché le donne harari portano ... brillanti calzoncini di seta elegantissimi, ma sudici. (Lilli 1941: 342–43)

[Very dark-skinned, they wear clothes, shoes and veils that are violet, yellow or red and that are edged with wide blue or orange stripes, sprinkled with tiny black dots. Their skirts go down to their shin, but the skirt is not the most striking part of their dress, it is only a kind of covering, because the women of Harar wear ... brilliantly coloured and extremely elegant, though dirty, silk breeches.]

The descriptions of both Lilli and Poggiali imply an association between the exotic and the erotic; they do not allow for any kind of intersubjectivity. In Vergani's prose, disavowal is more closely associated with desire. Pausing in the course of his journey at Lake Margherita, he observes:

Era un deserto variegato di verde e di giallo, il teatro di una terra abbandonata dagli uomini. Sulla porta dell'ultima capanna stavano mute in uno stupore ferino due donne ignude, con tetri corpi di diavolette incollati come figure da manifesto sullo sfondo della parete di canne annerite dal fumo. (Vergani 1938: 126–27)

[It was a wasteland shot through with green and yellow, the theatre of a land abandoned by men. Standing on the threshold of the last hut, were two naked women, speechless in a kind of untamed amazement, their dark bodies (like those of female devils) seemed attached (like the figures of a poster) to the wall of bamboo blackened by smoke.]

The above extract is a fairly typical piece of writing both of *La via nera* and of travel accounts to Ethiopia in general. The remote part of the empire in which the writer finds himself is evoked as a desert, a theatre, an abandoned locality, one which is distant from society and at some unspecified point of liminality. The writer emphasizes both a sense of

solitude and a sense of being observed; his apparition has disturbed his surroundings. The description of the two Ethiopian women is akin to thousands of photographic representations of ‘venere nere’ – it focuses upon their nudity and upon their physical presence. The term ‘diavolesse’ is one that occurs regularly in accounts of visits to the empire, and is part of a tendency to describe ethnic differences through a vocabulary which forces an ‘existential deviation’ (Fanon 1968: 16) on to the subject population. Present within the term is a notion of sexual temptation, of the attraction of the prohibited: the women seen by Vergani are represented as symbolically associated with sin, they are the very opposite of the Italian women settlers who fulfil the sacred duty of advancing the demographic campaign in the colonies. Although the sexual interest of the writer comes close to becoming explicit, he remains a spectator who observes from a distance. There is, however, another facet to the writer’s perception: the women he sees are sexually attractive, but they are also described as primitive. Their inferiority is taken for granted both by Vergani and by the reader implied by the text. A clear sense of racial hierarchy pervades the vision of the two women.

Memories of Empire

At the heart of Fascist narratives of settlement lay a pattern of barely concealed contradictions. Sexual relations between citizens and subjects were officially prohibited, yet the exploitation of Ethiopian and Eritrean women by Italian soldiers and bureaucrats was rampant.³⁴ Apologists for empire claimed that the Italian presence in Africa served a civilizing purpose, yet the system of racial discrimination that operated in Africa Orientale Italiana confined the subject population to an unalterably low position. There were contradictions between desires of the individual and the posited duty of the collectivity, between modern and retrogressive impulses (Ben-Ghiat 1996: 115). Fanon’s definition of the colonial world as a Manichaean creation, where ‘the place of the native’ is delimited both physically by the army and police and metaphysically by a whole gamut of denigratory discourses (Fanon 1961: 31–32), applies perfectly to AOI. Italian rule of Ethiopia was supposed to encourage collaboration between colonizers and colonized, yet the imperial edifice was founded on violence. Despite the official censors’ best efforts, a sense of the violence inherent in the colonial project pervaded most accounts of journeys to the empire. Dei Gaslini and Poggiali reflected on the massive schemes to uproot local communities so that settlers could live in isolated districts. The latter observed laconically that in Addis Ababa the process

of forcibly moving nearly 100,000 people was not easy (Poggiali 1938: 347; Dei Gaslini 1941: 12).

What emerges from the various accounts of such journeys is a desire to repeat the dominant ideas of Fascist imperialism and an inadvertent repetition of their contradictions. The barely modified reformulation of the same discursive constructs hints at their power and, for the visitors to AOI, their apparent naturalness. In the official reports of the time, the newly acquired space was figured according to the relationships between competing concepts of occupation. Symbolic representations of the conquered land as pastoral paradise or as paradigm of modernity tended to slide together, thus increasing the potential for ambiguity. Within this ideological configuration, with its literal and metaphorical hierarchies, the same ideal types recurred. The soldiers, bureaucrats and colonists who appeared in the travel texts all displayed the extent to which imperial narratives shaped understandings of personal identity. The textual devices that the writers of the different travel accounts deployed to represent themselves magnify the point. If the narrative persona of figures like Vergani or Melchiori manifests an obsession with national prestige and a desire to mimic the attributes of prescribed behaviour, then the figures of Diel and Felter Sartori foreground a variety of specifically gendered subject positions. It is not these self figurations, however, but the variety of conflictual positions occupied by the colonial subject within the various accounts of empire that provides the most vivid evidence of the facility with which exploitation was legitimated, though denied, within the Fascist colonial project.

The degree of contradiction that is inscribed within the very observation of the new empire is, as one might imagine, even more evident in the private reflections of those who lived through the experience and in writing that looks back at the short history of the Italian presence in Ethiopia. In 1971 Ciro Poggiali published the diary that he had written in secret tandem with the articles that he had dispatched to the *Corriere della Sera*. Introduced by a modest but pointed preface, the diary entries serve as one of the most valuable records of life in the upper administrative circles of the empire. While never questioning the basic premises of the invasion, Poggiali proves a caustic observer of the incompetence and brutality that typified Italian rule.³⁵ Writing without fear of censorship, he was less keen to repeat official shibboleths regarding race and was often struck by the dignity that many Africans displayed. His entry for 30 July 1936 described the public execution of one of the most prominent resisters to the newly installed regime, the abuna (priest) Petros (1971: 75–78). Petros was tried and executed in the market place of Addis Ababa after having attempted to enlist the support

of ras Hailù in opposing Graziani's rule. Poggiali wrote as someone who was close to power and who fulfilled a clearly identifiable role within its operation, yet his account of the serenity with which the priest approached his death is a striking instance of a critical awareness of the ambiguity of the Italian mission in Africa.³⁶

The publication of Poggiali's text in the 1970s is of interest because of the private interpretation of the colonial enterprise, but a similarly significant text for the memory of life during the empire was published in 1978. Anna Maria Mòglie's *Africa come amore* [Africa like Love], the author's diary of her experience of life in eastern Ethiopia, gives a vivid description of the kind of existence which women settlers led in Africa both before and after the outbreak of the Second World War.³⁷ Mòglie charts the physical sensations of living in Africa, the privations that she suffered and the toll on her health exacted by exposure to an unfamiliar climate. She records her initial sense of repugnance for the local population of Djibouti and Dire Dawa, her preference for remaining within the comparative safety of the Italian community and her difficulty in understanding or being understood by the servants employed by her husband. Nevertheless, the segregated world in which she lived did not preclude a growing consciousness of and respect for the life ways of the Africans with whom she came into contact. But it is the oral accounts of life in Italian East Africa collected by Irma Taddia in the 1980s that represent the most important resource for any reconstruction of colonial society. The series of testimonies were gathered largely from inhabitants of Emilia-Romagna who emigrated to Africa in the wake of the conquest of Ethiopia. They reveal the extent of the disparity between the enticements of official propaganda and the actual possibilities of settlement. They reveal both the hardships suffered by those who were tempted to stake their fate on a better life in the empire and the extent of the brutality used to suppress continuing resistance. In many instances, the testimonies point to the rapid experience of delusion and the desire to return to Italy. There are often disarmingly frank admissions that most Italians were drawn to AOI by the possibility of personal gain. In the words of A.R. (born in 1914, arrived in Africa in January 1936), Italians went to rob, exploit and look for opportunities for adventure, 'certainly not to spread culture and civilization' (Taddia 1988: 136).³⁸

Some of the writing of Poggiali or Mòglie and many oral testimonies offer a history of the everyday that is at odds with that which the official observers of the 1930s endeavoured to project; they expose bureaucratic inadequacy and an interest in material profit. But these memories offer nothing quite so simple as a description of reality, as opposed to pure rhetoric: they display, on the contrary, the reception of official narratives

of settlement, testimony of imperial policy in action, complicated negotiations between the public and the private. In many of the accounts collected by Taddia (1988), the ideologically motivated assertions of the time are remembered as exercising only a weak pull over the majority of settlers and yet in other memories of empire the vision articulated by the same pronouncements is the object of intense nostalgia. Organizations of people who once lived in Libya or AOI and related journals such as *Il Reduce d'Africa* or *Mai Tacli* have sought for decades to keep alive a memory of the Italian presence in North East Africa by publishing the memories of those who lived through the experience and by drawing attention to books, whether memorial or fictional, that seek to recreate a positive sense of the empire.³⁹ Through its militaristic rhetoric and iconography, *Il Reduce*, in particular, has sought to engage with the political realities of one decade after another but above all it has chastized successive governments for what it perceives as the desire of the Italian state to bury the memory of its African past. As one commentator asserts: 'The Africa of yesterday is forgotten, the war of yesterday is forgotten, and the sacrifices and the existence of yesterday are forgotten'.⁴⁰

The editorials of *Il Reduce* are generally constructed around a series of stark polarities: the lamented certainties of Fascism are contrasted with the endless compromises of democratic Italy; the benefits of colonialism are contrasted with the struggles of the post-colonial world. Above all, the generations that lived through the years of Italian East Africa are portrayed as infinitely superior to subsequent age groups that have forgotten Italy's colonial role. In the words of the long-standing editor, Fernando Feliciani: 'our generation was the most committed in the history of Italy to fighting in the interests of our society and our nation' (March 1992: 16).⁴¹ But perhaps the most interesting feature of a publication like *Il Reduce* is not the polemical and hostile stance that it assumes with regard to contemporary Italian society but the cult of memory that accompanies its aggressive editorial tone. The photographs of Italian East Africa that are reproduced in its columns are endowed with talismanic status; they are the relics of a time when the world appeared to obey the values in which the journal's readers still fervently believe. Alongside the photographs of cities and landscapes of North Africa are pictures of the military heroes still venerated by the dwindling group of survivors of Africa. Military ritual predominates at the annual reunions of the *Associazione Nazionale Reduci e Rimpatriati d'Africa* (ANRRA) [The National Association for Veterans and Refugees of Africa], which are duly reported in *Il Reduce*: the fallen of Italy's campaigns in Africa are remembered; the huge black and yellow banner of the national association is symbolically held by women members of ANRRA; the

pendant of newly formed local branches receives a blessing from a priest as the participants aim to recreate an atmosphere of solemnity and to assume a former sense of themselves. Such ceremonies together with a great deal of the writing of journals like *Il Reduce d'Africa* serve to perpetuate a notion of Italian colonialism as the fitting object of veneration rather than inquiry. What they also indicate is a blindness towards the racist implications of the colonial world and the disconcerting persistence, decades after the inglorious end of Italian rule of Ethiopia, of the same slogans of identity, the same investment in archetypes and the same narratives of settlement that filled the correspondence of early visitors to the empire.

Notes

1. For an introduction to the development of Italian colonial literature, see Tomasello (1984) and Caspar (1998). A photographic history of Italy's colonial engagement in Libya and East Africa is provided by Palma (1999).
2. Examples of such texts include Truffi (1936) and Traversi (1935). In both, the explorer becomes the seer of Italy's true vocation. Often the victim of ferocious cruelty, he is the martyr to a nationalistic ideal, the apostle of later expansion.
3. Accounts of the economic potential of Ethiopia include Pigli (1935) and Varanini (1935). The potential richness of Ethiopia ('the Switzerland of Africa') was something on which the *Rivista delle Colonie* was keen to insist on a monthly basis. It is worth noting, however, that Italian colonization of Ethiopia was hampered at all levels by a lack of reliable information on the resources of the country.
4. The growth in propaganda that accompanied the different stages of Italian expansion is explored in detail by Nicola Labanca (2002: 217–66).
5. The quotation is taken from the editorial of the *Rivista delle Colonie*, February 1935, 138.
6. Both museums (like the Museo dell'Africa italiana in Rome) and exhibitions (such as the Triennale d'Oltremare) allowed huge numbers of Italians a constant source of images of empire. On the exhibition culture of the regime, see Russo (1999).
7. In the preface to his work, Poggiali notes (1938: 1–2) that between 1935 and 1936 no fewer than 260 texts on Ethiopia were produced.
8. On the importance of the myth of palingenesis at the core of generic Fascist ideology, see Griffin (1993).
9. Most, if not all, the travellers whose work I refer to journeyed not only to Ethiopia but to the older colonial settlements of Eritrea and Somalia. It is on their perceptions of newly conquered territory that I wish to focus.
10. Diel's text, *Sieh unser neues Land mit offenen Augen*, appeared in Italian under the title of *AOI Cantieri d'Italia* (Diel 1939b).
11. For an examination of the regime's attempt to use film as a tool for encouraging mass consensus in its imperial policies, see Ben-Ghiat (1996: 130–44) and

- Brunetta and Gili (1990). Focusing on films like Corrado D'Errico's *Il cammino degli eroi* (1936) and Guido Brignone's *Sotto la croce del sud* [Under the Cross of the South] (1938), Ben-Ghiat examines the cinematic devices which are deployed in those films to suggest some of the deepest obsessions of the regime: its intention to reform the national character of Italians, its terror of miscegenation, its perception of the indigenous population as a threat to social order.
12. Irma Taddia, see below, has made an invaluable contribution to studies on AOI by collecting and analysing the oral testimony of Italian settlers (Taddia 1988). She has also collected the oral accounts of Ethiopians who lived through the invasion of 1935–36 (Taddia 1998).
 13. Poggiali, for example, quoted the viceroy Graziani's phrase: 'The trenches of peace can often be as dramatic as those of warfare' (Poggiali 1938: 5). Though Mussolini claimed that the new Italian empire would be an 'empire of peace', armed resistance continued, despite extremely brutal attempts at suppression, throughout the period of Italian rule. For an eyewitness account of several acts of violent aggression, see Poggiali's diary (1971). On the centrality of war rhetoric to all aspects of Fascist social policy and, in particular, to land reclamation, see Falasca-Zamponi (1997: 148–94).
 14. Melchiori wrote: 'Il miracolo si è compiuto anche laggiù, simile a quello che ha generato dall'acquitino e dalla morte Littoria, Sabaudia e gli altri paesi rurali dell'Agro Pontino' [A miracle has occurred there which is similar to that which has brought forth Littoria, Sabaudia and other rural towns of the Pontine Marshes from marshland and from death] (1938: 14).
 15. On the regime's demographic and settlement policies in East Africa, see Ipsen (1996: 119–45) and Larebo (1994).
 16. Gazing across the plains of Arussi and Kaffa, Dei Gaslini wrote of fertile soil, of verdant pastures, and of an 'immense training ground for our rural population' (1938: 189). In the writings of Alessandro Lessona, the empire is conceived as the answer to all of Italy's demographic and economic problems; it is also the vehicle for the transformation of metropolitan Italy into the promised land. Lessona adds that this vision of empire was 'too beautiful ever to be realized by men!' (1963: 358).
 17. For an account of the various missions sponsored by the Ufficio Studi of the Ministry of Colonial Affairs to map the resources of Ethiopia, see Del Boca (1982: 156–63) and Dainelli (1936a; 1936b).
 18. Many journals and newspapers of the time sought to carve out an identity for the empire by contrasting it with the perceived horror of 'l'impero negussiano' [The empire of the Negus], and by contrasting AOI with the British Empire – characterized as serving the interests of the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie. A leading article for *Critica Fascista*, entitled 'Sostanza dell'Impero', affirmed: 'Non poteva né può toccare ... alla Proletaria un impero borghese' [The proletariat neither could nor would expect a bourgeois empire], 15 June 1936.
 19. In his declaration of empire to the Italian people on 9 May 1936, Mussolini asked the massive audience gathered at night in front of Palazzo Venezia whether they were 'worthy of empire'. He repeated his question three times. In the prose piece 'Stelle sull'impero', Ugo Ojetti (1951) gave an enthusiastic account of the vast ritualistic spectacle which was the declaration of empire.

20. On 27 May 1936, the press was directed by Mussolini 'to observe an absolute distinction between the race that dominates and the race that is dominated' (Cassero 2004: 20).
21. Gadda wrote of 4,666 women, from every social class, attending the courses. He concluded his article with the assertion that it was the role of colonial women to be, 'le compagne, le madri, le consolatrici di chi lavora, di chi osa, di chi vince' [The companions, the mothers, the consolers of those who work, who dare and who win] (Gadda 1938: 1251).
22. Alba Felter Sartori (born in 1897) was the daughter of the representative of the Italian government and former soldier, Pietro Felter (1856–1915), who played a leading role in the liberation of Italian troops at Makallé (1896); see Surdich (1996). Her journey to Ethiopia was in part motivated by the desire to repossess some of the belongings of her father in Harar.
23. On the significance of Felter Sartori's image of herself in her writing and its relevance to the construction of gender types in the Fascist colonial project, see the work of Cristina Lombardi-Diop (2005).
24. Edoardo Zavattari was director of the institute of zoology in the University of Rome. Along with Lidio Cipriani he was one of the signatories of the Manifesto della Razza in 1938.
25. Lidio Cipriani taught anthropology at the University of Florence. On the ideological motivation behind his work, see Sòrgoni (1998: 182–92).
26. Raffaello Di Lauro (1940: 48) founded his treatise on colonial rule on the repeated assertion that: 'I dominati in Africa sono in grandissima parte, dei barbari, dei selvaggi' [The dominated people of Africa are, in large part, barbarous and wild].
27. All writers hinted at the possibilities for the exploitation of the human resources of the empire. Part three of Poggiali's book was entitled 'La materia umana' [Human matter]. A point on which Di Lauro insisted was that construction work in temperatures above 40 degrees necessitated an indigenous workforce (Di Lauro 1940: 49–54).
28. In the caption accompanying his photograph, Poggiali wryly observed that Ethiopian children used the Fascist salute as a means of begging for money.
29. Naturally an observation of the kind which ignored the complexity of the administrative tasks that had faced Italian officials in Eritrea from the beginning of the century. For a study of the relations between the Italian settler community and the population of outlying areas of Eritrea before the invasion of 1935, see Sòrgoni's extensive biography (2001) of the high-ranking official and ethnographer, Angelo Pollera (1873–1939).
30. This kind of identification extended to the perceived reception of architecture (Piccioli 1936: 1048). In his treatise, Di Lauro affirmed: 'Se il negro vede nel bianco il suo ideale occorre non deluderlo' (1940: 59) [If the black see their ideal in the white then they should not be disappointed].
31. Sandra Ponzanesi (2005) has examined the wider resonances of the colonial image of the black Venus.
32. At the end of the imperial adventure in East Africa, the number of people of mixed race was around 35,000 (Palma 1999: 53).
33. The contradictions between theory and practice were to an extent revealed in his diary (1971); see below.

34. In the conclusion of her study on colonial practice and legislation in Eritrea between 1935 and 1941, Sòrgoni (1998) admits that evidence of widespread sexual relations between colonizers and colonized can be read as showing the inability of Fascism to develop a racist consciousness among ordinary Italians. Yet, she contends that a concept of racial hierarchy existed at every level of colonial society and that the domination of one ethnic group by another was evident in the forms of sexual encounter that existed between Italian men and Eritrean women.
35. Poggiali's photographs of the mounds of the Ethiopian dead, killed in reprisal for the attempted assassination of Graziani (19 February 1937), most graphically represent the brutality that the newly installed ruling class was capable of.
36. Even Giuseppe Bottai (1940) expressed his anxiety for the lack of 'civiltà' on the part of many of the Italian colonists.
37. Mòglie, the wife of a banking official, arrived in Dire Dawa in late 1938. Her diary recounts not only the final period of Italian rule but also the events of the war in Africa, the end of the imperial experience, imprisonment and repatriation in 1942.
38. Based extensively on archival research, Giulia Barrera's inquiry into state-settler relations in AOI (2003) gives a comprehensive picture of the kinds of behaviour that the colonial authorities attempted to regulate. The essay explores the political reasons behind the drive of the state to establish clear racial hierarchies and the social factors that inhibited their successful implementation.
39. Founded in 1961, *Il Reduce d'Africa* [The Veteran of Africa] is the mouthpiece of ANRRA. The explicit purpose of the journal was to bring together people who had fought in Africa and who were keen to retain the 'spiritual heritage' of those who had fallen for Italy's 'fourth shore' (Fernando Feliciani, January 1991, 1). Examples of the books that the journal has looked favourably upon are: Bruttini and Puglisi (1957), Lenoci (1993) and Mascetti (1997). *Mai Tacli* (meaning 'clear water' in Tigray) has appeared since the 1970s. It is published by a group of the former inhabitants of Asmara, the majority of whom were the children of bureaucrats and entrepreneurs who settled in Eritrea in the late 1930s. Its purpose is to gather together the episodes, sensations and images that constituted life in Eritrea for the colony's Italian community. For a longer discussion of colonial associations and the memory of AOI, see Burdett 2005.
40. Massimo Zamorani, *Il Reduce d'Africa*, June 1996, 16.
41. Fernando Feliciani, a former soldier, was editor of the journal from 1974 until his death in 1995.

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Chapter 5

Itineraries through Melodrama:

Italian Correspondents and the Spanish Civil War

In the words of Hugh Thomas, the 1930s were the ‘great age of the foreign correspondent’ and from the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War at the end of July 1936 until its end two and a half years later, ‘the greatest names in world journalism were usually to be found south of the Pyrenees’ (1961: 235). For the British or American public, writers such as Ernest Hemingway, Arthur Koestler and George Orwell, whether they participated as observers or as combatants, all reported from the Republican front.¹ Their writings married interpretations of the ideological significance of the conflict with highly personal accounts of the physical and emotional experience of warfare. Writing from Madrid, Hemingway evoked the atmosphere of the capital under siege and, visiting the battlefields of Guadalajara and of the Jarama valley, reported on the morale within the International Brigades and of the sight of the mutilated bodies of the dead or dying (Hemingway 1938: 10–13, 17–23). Orwell’s *Homage to Catalonia* provided its readers with a detailed account of the desultory character of the war, of the privations of trench warfare and of the fighting between Communists, Anarchists and members of the P.O.U.M. militias in Barcelona in May 1937 (Orwell 1989). Arthur Koestler was among the few foreign reporters to visit Seville shortly after the city had succumbed to the Nationalist assault and to speak to the newly installed commander, General Queipo de Llano. Subsequently, he wrote from Valencia and, until he was imprisoned in the wake of the city’s capitulation, from Malaga. Photographers like David Seymour, Robert Capa or Gerda Taro presented a haunting gallery of human expectation and suffering. The photographs of the moment of a militiaman’s death, of the fighting in the shattered monumental buildings of Teruel or of women and children

running for cover during the aerial bombardment of Bilbao retain their status as icons of the destruction wrought by the clash of ideologies in the 1930s.²

In the view of Paul Preston, the Civil War inspired the writers and artists of its day in a way that no other war has subsequently repeated (Preston 2001: 16). Figures like Hemingway or Orwell wrote not only as reporters from the different theatres of the war, they also wrote as writers. With its skill in representing competing belief systems in the minds of its protagonists, its dramatic relation of the war to the long standing cultural traditions of central and southern Spain and its frankness in dealing with the atrocities committed by both sides, Hemingway's *For Whom The Bell Tolls* (1941) used fiction as a means of taking war reporting further. For Anthony Burgess the novel was the most accomplished piece of correspondence to emerge from the war.³ *Homage to Catalonia*, like *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, occupies an established place within the modern canon, while Koestler's autobiographical narration of imprisonment firstly in Malaga and then in Seville (1937), with its documentation of the climate of daily executions and its meditations on death and time, remains a powerful evocation of the conflict. The type of writing produced by a number of internationally renowned individuals during the conflict raises intricate questions of the relation of observation to documentation and of reporting to photography and fiction. Both written and photographic accounts of the war exerted a powerful effect on their original readers or viewers, who may well have seen the slaughter in Spain as a prelude to the coming struggle against fascism. Such accounts have also succeeded in etching a particular view of the Civil War onto a collective consciousness, at least in Britain or the United States, of the twentieth century.⁴

In contrast to the kind of reporting that appeared in the British, French and American press, contemporary Italian representations of the Civil War were, in the words of Leonardo Sciascia, one of the lowest points of Italian journalism (1988: 178). The many correspondents who were sent by Italian dailies to cover the war were willing to submit to the propagandistic needs of the regime, to couch their observations in triumphalist rhetoric, to make gross simplifications concerning the causes of the war and to display a deliberate blindness towards the setbacks of Italian troops. The Spain they travelled to was a different country from that visited by journalists sympathetic to the Republic, and the war that they witnessed bore little relation to the conflict as it was described in the democratic press.⁵ If the work of writers, artists and photographers from a range of democratic countries has provided

testimony of the war in Spain, representations of Italian intervention have not survived the time in which they were written. With the exception of Lilli's *Racconti di una guerra* (1941), no text that emerged from the documentation of the Civil War in the Italian press has been reprinted or attained a readership that can in any sense be compared with that of *Spanish Testament* or *Homage to Catalonia*. So far as an echo of the war in Spain does survive in the established media of Italian culture, it is in the work of writers who have sought, either through fiction or non-fiction, to examine the implications of Italy's role in Spain by looking at the contradictions between the rhetoric of the regime and the actions of individuals. The enforced involvement of Italian soldiers in Spain is, for example, the subject of Sciascia's well-known short story, 'L'antimonio', in *Gli zii di Sicilia* [The Sicilian Uncles] (Sciascia 1958), while the later *Ore di Spagna* [Hours of Spain] (1988) presents a complex image of Spain emerging from Franco's dictatorship as the writer's memory of the presentation of the Civil War to the Italian public is triggered by a journey he undertakes through Spain.

Yet, Italy was one of the first countries to become embroiled in Spain and the war received extremely extensive coverage in the Italian press. Between 1937 and 1939 it became, for months at a time, the dominant subject of the national dailies, even relegating the chronicling of the colonization of the empire to a secondary position. Leading Italian newspapers sent their most seasoned reporters to cover the development of hostilities and the stages of Italian military participation. The *Corriere della Sera* initially sent Achille Benedetti, Renzo Segala and Cesco Tomaselli. From 1937 Guido Piovene reported from Spain accompanied by Marino Massai. Piovene's stay in Spain was to last until December 1938 and prove a formative experience in a prolific literary and journalistic career. Massai stayed in Spain until the fall of Madrid, piloting his own plane and covering the aerial operations of the war. The *Corriere* consistently emphasized the daring nature of his reporting; in one editorial he was described as emblematic of 'the spirit that disdains comfortable living' and which is 'always willing to accept whatever risk' (*Corriere della Sera*, 1937).⁶ As the Republic began to slide towards defeat in early 1939, the *Corriere* dispatched Virgilio Lilli and Ciro Poggiali to follow the concluding chapter of the war.⁷ *La Stampa* sent Riccardo Forte, Giovanni Artieri and Sandro Sandri to Spain, while Curio Mortari wrote from France on the trail of supplies sent by the democratic powers to the beleaguered Republic. Sandro Sandri stands out among the journalists sent by *La Stampa* insofar as his fellow correspondents regarded him as exceptionally charismatic. In the reflections of reporters who covered the Civil War he emerges as the ideal of the foreign

correspondent, an archetype of the Fascist man determined to live life dangerously. He was killed shortly after leaving Spain in the autumn of 1937 to cover, with Luigi Barzini Jnr., the Japanese invasion of China.⁸

Lamberto Sorrentino, a veteran of the First World War, Fiume and the Ethiopian campaign, wrote on the war for *La Gazzetta del Popolo*. He had covered Balbo's flight across the Atlantic (July 1933) after having reported events in Brazil for *Il Popolo d'Italia*. In his view, Mussolini's overseas adventures had required the foreign correspondent both 'to fantasize' and 'to march in step' (1939: 358). Luigi Barzini Sr., with a highly distinguished career as a foreign correspondent stretching back to the beginning of the century and involving such famous episodes as his car journey from Peking to Paris (1906), wrote on the war for *Il Popolo d'Italia*.⁹ Gian Gaspare Napolitano acted as the war correspondent for Leo Longanesi's *Omnibus*, while from the offices of *El Norte de Castilla* in Valladolid, Stanis Ruinas worked as the editor of *Il Legionario* – the paper for the Italian combatants in Spain or rather the vehicle through which the Italian expeditionary force was subjected to official propaganda (Ruinas 1940: 229).¹⁰ Other journalists entrusted with giving Fascist Italy's view of the war and who all published books on either the war's origins or its progress included Concetto Pettinato (1930; 1939), Nello Quilici (1938), Giuseppe Rasi (1937) and Alessandro Volta (1937). Though the reporters sent by all Italian dailies were men, in February 1939 the *Corriere* printed one of the few accounts of the war written by Italian women. In three extended articles, Luigi Barzini's daughter, Emma, published a detailed description (1939a, b and c) of the time that she and her husband had been compelled to spend in Republican Spain.¹¹

Franco was certainly conscious of the importance of securing sympathetic coverage in the foreign press and, as Glauco Licata has documented, each foreign journalist was provided, where necessary, with a car, an interpreter and a Falangist escort. In the early stages of the war, Italian journalists would send as a rule one telegram a day to their respective newspapers while photographs could be sent by air from Seville. The situation was made easier from the end of January 1938 when Italian newspapers could use as their base St Jean de Luz in France (Licata 1976: 287). From the details contained in many of the dispatches sent from Spain, and particularly in the collections of articles that several journalists subsequently published (Segala 1938; Sorrentino 1939; Lilli 1988), it is possible to gain a sense of the daily life of the war correspondent and especially the close contact with Italian troops. The groups of reporters tended to be based in the same towns (Salamanca when reporting from the Aragon front, Talavera when following offensives against Madrid) and to stay in the same hotels. Virgilio Lilli

(1988: 83) describes in some detail the life of a reporter in the Grand Hotel at Zaragoza, requisitioned by Italian and Nationalist forces close to the Aragon front. At times of relative calm in the fighting the various correspondents would travel daily to the front although they all referred to the difficulty of finding transport either during a successful Nationalist offensive or when needing to travel rapidly to Saint Jean de Luz (Piovene 1975: 218). Correspondents from different newspapers tended to associate together and to travel in the company of other foreign observers such as *The Daily Telegraph*'s Pernbrook Stephens or W.P. Carney of the *New York Times* (Segala 1938: 208). *La Stampa* sent a photographer to Spain but the *Corriere* relied on its own reporters to provide images of the war (Licata 1976: 287). In many of the photographs reproduced in Renzo Segala's collection of articles, groups of Italian correspondents are seen posing for the camera (Segala 1938: 112) against the backdrop of a deserted or newly 'liberated' Spanish town [Figure 5.1].

The itinerary that Italian journalists followed through Spain was dictated by the nature of the regime's interest in the conflict and by the deployment of the Italian expeditionary army. Shortly after the outbreak of the Civil War the Italian press was ordered to restrict coverage to simple news stories (Coverdale 1975: 264). The decision to send combat troops to the aid of Franco was reached gradually and it was not until December 1936 that massive numbers of Italian soldiers began to arrive in Cadiz.¹² As has been shown by Coverdale (1975: 12–16), Italian



Figure 5.1. Italian journalists pose for the camera (Segala 1938: 112). Reprinted with the permission of the *Corriere della Sera*.

intervention in Spain was motivated not only by the fear that a victory of liberalism or Communism in Spain might encourage dissent at home or by the perception of the need to secure the western side of the Mediterranean.¹³ One of the most important factors in deciding large-scale military commitment was a desire for the prestige of Fascism to be enhanced both at home and abroad through a series of spectacular victories in Spain. Italian troops were organized as a separate corps to be used in decisive military operations, and the friction between Franco and Mussolini derived largely from the latter's desire for offensive action when the Nationalist command was in favour of the consolidation of territory.

Initially, at least, Italian war correspondents must have believed that they would be covering, much as many of them had done a year earlier in Ethiopia, a rapid victory that would redound to the credit of the Duce. The nature of the war did, however, mean that they were required to move rapidly from one theatre of action to another. In early 1937 they were divided between the Madrid front and the advance of Franco's forces in Andalusia. In mid-January the Italian press began to report the move of the *Corpo Truppe Volontarie* [Corps of Voluntary Troops] (CTV) on Malaga. In the view of Koestler, the Republican defence of the town was little short of shambolic (1937: 178–204) and at the beginning of February Italian dailies announced to their readers the stunning success of the Italian legionaries in capturing the town. The fall of Malaga was not to prove the beginning of a series of impressive military victories that Mussolini and Ciano had hoped for. From the beginning of March correspondents were accompanying Italian troops in the driving rain near Guadalajara and reporting confidently on the important offensive to the north-east of the capital. When the offensive crumbled and succumbed to a ferocious counter-attack the Italian press was suddenly as silent on the results of the attack as it had been on the composition of the International Brigades against which Roatta's four divisions had been pitted.¹⁴ The exception to the rule of silence was Sandro Sandri's evocation on 24 March of the conditions of Italian soldiers in Brihuega, the town at the centre of the Republican counter-attack; he wrote of the rain pouring down on men covered in mud in the tomb-like surroundings of the battle's circular valley (Sandri 1937a). But the article was published, misleadingly, several days after Italian troops had been routed from Brihuega and when the coverage of Guadalajara had given way to reporting of the Duce's triumphal return from his journey to Libya (*La Stampa* 1937).

On 17 June 1937, in an unsigned article for *Il Popolo d'Italia*, Mussolini himself gave his interpretation of the battle. In his view, it was

more an 'insuccesso' [a lack of success] rather than a failure, let alone the 'catastrophe' that had been reported in the British and French press. The reasons he adduced for the unexpected failure of Italian troops to take Guadalajara, and from there advance on Madrid, lay in the exceptionally inclement weather and in the commanders decision to withdraw when the Italian front line could have resisted the Republican counter-attack. Not concealing the extent of Italian losses, and accentuating his intemperate tone, he ended his article with the declaration: 'The dead of Guadalajara will be avenged'. Despite Mussolini's protestations to the contrary, defeat at Guadalajara was a crushing blow to the notion of Fascist invincibility and an ironic reversal of the plan to win a string of dramatic victories. Defeat also had the effect of producing the need for military success to cancel the memory of disaster.¹⁵ By the beginning of April 1937, the majority of Italian journalists had moved north to cover General Mola's offensive on the Basque country. The interpretation of the saturation bombing of Guernica by the Condor Legion on 26 April fell to Segala for the *Corriere* and to Sandri for *La Stampa*. Neither had any qualms in protesting that the news of the German incendiary bombing was a malicious lie disseminated by the democratic press and that in reality the town had been utterly destroyed in the course of the Republican retreat (Sandri 1937b; Segala 1937).¹⁶ Segala repeated the accusation together with pictures of the town's destruction in his subsequent collection of articles (Segala 1938: 109). By early June the Nationalists had broken through Bilbao's fabled but ultimately vulnerable 'ring of steel' and in mid-June the Italian correspondents following the offensive in the north were reporting the arrival of Nationalist troops on the outskirts of Bilbao. On 22 June they were celebrating the city's 'liberation' and the appearance of Italian tanks on its streets. Republican attempts to relieve pressure on the northern front with the counter-attack at Brunete, to the west of Madrid, in early July were to prove a costly failure despite their initial success and on 26 July the *Corriere* was reporting a Republican 'catastrophe'. Whatever relief the offensive at Brunete brought to the north it was short-lived: from Bilbao the Nationalists moved on the nearest Republican centre, Santander. Italian troops played a leading part in the attack and on 26 August 1937 the front page of most Italian newspapers was devoted to the town's surrender. A few days later the victorious parade of Italian troops through Santander was again front-page news.

With the defeat at Brunete and the capitulation of Cantabria, Asturias and the Basque region, the action of the Civil War shifted to the Aragon front, with the Republican offensive at Belchite, and subsequently at Teruel at the end of 1937. The Nationalist struggle to recover the town,

though it did not involve the use of large numbers of Italian troops, was covered by Benedetti and Massai for the *Corriere* and by Forte and Artieri for *La Stampa*. Following the eventual victory at Teruel in February 1938 the majority of Italian journalists followed the offensive into Aragon. By May, they had witnessed the *Corpo Truppe Volontarie* capture of Tortosa and the Nationalist arrival at the Mediterranean. The last Republican counter-attack of the war, across the Ebro to the north of Tortosa, was launched in late July 1938. The crossing of the Ebro was initially successful, but as at Brunete and Teruel the gains that had been achieved through surprise were eventually lost to ruinous Nationalist action in late October and early November.¹⁷ The Republican offensive initially met with silence in the Italian press, as did the tenacity with which the enemy line resisted the counter-attacks of August and September. As it became clear, however, that Republican advance positions would succumb to the ferocity of German and Italian aerial bombardment, the Battle of the Ebro received more extensive coverage. On 17 November 1938 the *Corriere* gave notice that 22,000 *rossi* had been captured in the battle of the Ebro. As the Nationalist advance into Catalonia, in the wake of the slaughter along the Ebro, gathered momentum and victory became more of an inevitability, then the war rarely left the front page of most Italian dailies. For the *Corriere* Lilli reported from one Catalan town after another as they surrendered to Italian or Nationalist troops. The fall of Barcelona was reported at the end of January and the celebration of the fall of the city was repeated in the Italian press on 25 February with the blanket coverage of the victory parade. By March of 1939 almost all Italian journalists had moved from northeastern Spain to the capital in anticipation of the fall of Madrid – an event which was duly announced as the final victory of Fascism on 29 March 1939.¹⁸

Metaphorical Descriptions of the War

Any study of Italian reporting from the Nationalist front is unlikely to reveal the complexity of human experience that writers such as Hemingway or Orwell or photographers such like Capa or Seymour were able to capture when writing from the opposing side. But even though Italian correspondents wrote on Spain within the limits of propaganda, elements of introspection and autobiography can be found in their work. As Sciascia wrote in his commentary on the writings of Virgilio Lilli, all reporters had in some sense to confront, amidst the extremities of the situation, aspects of their own beliefs – the meaning of their Catholic

faith, the depth of their allegiance to Fascism, or their feelings towards people, fragments of whose lives they witnessed (Sciascia 1988: 180). Instances where reporters reflected upon the moral or human significance of a particular event provide an insight into the belief structure in which such reflections occurred. More importantly, a study of the entirety of the journalistic writing to emerge from Spain reveals the multi-faceted nature of the exploitation of the Civil War within the official culture of the late 1930s. Examining the reclamation projects to the south of Rome and the conquest of Ethiopia, Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi (1997: 14–182) has examined the ways in which the propaganda of the regime cast the progress of its domestic and foreign policy in terms of a melodramatic struggle between good and evil. An analysis of articles written from within Nationalist Spain (usually printed on the third page of Italian dailies) together with the often terse bulletins from the front and the collected writings of Italy's war correspondents exposes the extent to which the Civil War assumed a metaphorical dimension within the media of the time. Individual perceptions, whether written or photographic, played a significant part in the production of a vision of the conflict as the clash of the forces of civilization against those of barbarity. The predominant interpretation of the conflict was expressed succinctly by Guido Manacorda (1937):

Dalla parte di Franco, la fede, la moralità, l'ordine, la pace, il progresso sociale per tutte le classi in una parola, la civiltà. Dalla parte marxista, l'ateismo, la sfrenatezza, il disordine, il settarismo, la lotta belluina; in una parola la barbarie.¹⁹

[On the side of Franco, faith, morality, order, peace, progress for all social classes, in a word, civilization. On the Marxist side, atheism, lack of control, disorder, sectarianism, ferocious antagonism, in a word, barbarity.]

To read about the Civil War as it was represented in the Italian press was to enter a coherent, highly structured world of Manichean oppositions: the enemy was carefully and consistently dehumanized, the forces supporting Franco were exalted and, through struggle and sacrifice, a triumphant march towards victory was first predicted then performed. The notion of a battle between good and evil was accentuated not only by the repeated reference to the opposition between civilization and barbarism but also by the increasingly common conception of the war as a clash of religions. In the preface to his book, Lamberto Sorrentino referred to the Spanish Civil War as the 'most complex war of religion that humanity has ever seen' (1939: 10). The allegorical interpretation of the war as a struggle between competing religions was necessarily substantiated by the idea that Italian troops in Spain were aiding the Nationalists in a struggle against Communism – a message designed to

appeal to the original adherents of Fascism (Coverdale 1975: 265). The main thesis of Francesco Belforte's text on the Civil War (1938) was that Italian intervention was in response to the massive interventionist programmes of France and Russia and to save Spain from the hell of Bolshevik revolution.²⁰ The notion that everything in Spain pointed to an imminent Communist take-over was one that the corps of journalists rarely tired of repeating (Volta 1937: 21, 52; Sorrentino 1939: 13, 41; Lilli 1988: 16), and one of the most frequently deployed strategies for denigrating Republican Spain was to present it as merely a puppet in the hands of Bolshevik masters. Those Spaniards who remained loyal to the government were either the servants of a non-European ideology or the agents of a foreign power.²¹ The repetition of the idea that the Republic was merely a 'colony of Moscow' (Volta 1937: 24) or the magnet for social agitators from around the globe (Quilici 1938: 107) may not have reflected the nature of the government in Madrid at the time of the revolt or indeed the conflict between legitimacy and revolution that lay at the heart of Republican resistance. It did, however, facilitate the presentation of the enemy along the lines of a sinister, orientalizing fantasy. In accounts of the war the Communist enemy was evoked not only as a threat but also as an object of disgust. The metaphor of a disease spreading across Spain was one that was often used: Communism was seen as an Asiatic virus or the 'red plague' (Cremascoli 1939: 35–44; Sorrentino 1939: 328), its adherents were portrayed as refuse (Cremascoli 1939: 42; Ruinas 1940: 235). In the work of a number of correspondents and at the time when the race laws were being introduced in Italy, the denunciation of 'i rossi' carried undertones of anti-Semitism (Segala 1938: 70; Ruinas 1940: 90, 259). In late August 1938 the *Corriere della Sera* published extracts of William Foss's *Spanish Arena* with its contention that the Spanish Revolution movements had received its impetus from a small and largely Jewish international clique (1938: 149).²²

The supporters of the Republic were defined as guilty of petty criminality, extreme cruelty and senseless violence, while remaining essentially inscrutable. Referring to Yvon Delbos' condemnation of Soviet Russia (1933), Nello Quilici maintained that the insurrections, killings and burnings which, in his view, characterized Republican Spain, reflected the 'obsession with violence' of Russian Bolshevism (1938: 96). Most Italian journalists provided lurid details of the violent suppression of resistance on the other side of the front (for example, Volta 1937: 153). In the three articles she published as a captive in the 'inferno of Communist Spain', Emma Barzini gave an account of the Republic seen through the eyes of an unequivocal supporter of the Nationalist uprising. In Madrid she witnessed the population of the

capital being terrorized by squads of militiamen, the killing of suspected sympathizers of Franco and the spectacle of women and children going to see the victims of such purges (1939b). In Barcelona she insisted on the contrast between the wealth of government officials and the dire poverty of the city's ordinary inhabitants (1939a; 1939c). When Barcelona fell on 26 January 1939, the iniquities (both real and imagined) perpetuated in the 'Marxist capital' were documented by most Italian correspondents. For the *Corriere*, Lilli gathered the testimony of those detained on the prison ships in the city's port. Franco Cremascoli, sent by E.I.A.R. (Ente Italiano Auzioni Radiofoniche) three days after the city's capitulation, produced a number of radio broadcasts on the activities of the S.I.M (Servicio Informaciones Militares) and of the NKVD (secret police) through the testimony of liberated prisoners. The book in which the printed version of his broadcasts appeared contained an extensive series of photographs of the cells and torture rooms in the NKVD's headquarters in Calle Zaragoza and in Calle Vallmajor (Cremascoli 1939). In the preface to the text, Spain was defined as the 'tomb of Bolshevism' (1939: viii).

The description of food shortages, strife between opposing political factions (the riots in Barcelona in May 1937 received wide coverage in Italy), daily sequestrations and killings were intended to play on basic fears and, like all propaganda, to influence contemporary opinion. But the correspondents for Italy's major newspapers concentrated also on painting a picture of the destruction to the country's urban landscape, social fabric and religious institutions, which they believed was the legacy of the Republic. The apocalyptic vision of the end of civilization or the triumph of evil was achieved through a variety of strategies. As the war correspondents followed the Nationalist advance first in Andalusia and the Basque region and subsequently into Catalonia, they gave an account of the destruction left in the wake of the Republican retreat that was not lacking in literary or historical parallels. On the fall of Malaga, Benedetti (1937) evoked the condition of the city's population by calling to mind Manzoni's descriptions of Milan during the plague. When attributing the devastation in Guernica to the 'reds', Segala (1937) asserted that they had, in raising the town to the ground, shown the same savagery as marauding medieval armies. Moving from one small Catalan town to another, Lilli spoke of following a swarm of locusts (1988: 85), while Artieri wrote of following the Communist retreat through a landscape of ruins (1937).

Pictures of this 'landscape of ruins' became one of the recurring images of the conflict in the magazines and national dailies of Fascist Italy. The photographs taken by Segala of the war in the north in the

spring and summer of 1937 were entirely typical of the sort of photographic production during the conflict – other emblematic examples are Sandri's pictures of the fall of Malaga or the repeated shots of the charred buildings of Madrid's university city. Segala's photographs of the entry into the Basque town of Eibar (1938: 81) [Figure 5.2] or of Guernica after the bombardment (1938: 109) [Figure 5.3] are clearly intended to incriminate the retreating enemy. They appear to pile up further evidence of the destructive potential of the Republic and justify the intervention of the Italian army in the conflict. Yet they also carry other powerful suggestions at both an obvious and a subliminal level. The pictures of either Guernica or Eibar command attention because of their difference from any normal urban scene: the eerie emptiness of these towns coupled with the apparent suddenness of their shift from urban centre to ruin alludes to an intensity of human suffering. But the photographs make no sense unless they are incorporated within the stark polarization of right and wrong that typified the Italian narrative of the war. The empty, desolate landscapes are pictures not only of the theatre in which the struggle occurs, they are also representations of the enemy. In the words of Piovene, the West can expect only 'disorder and disaster from the Soviet regime' (1937), while in Belforte's opinion Communism has brought to the Spanish people 'the destruction of its cities, the



Figure 5.2. Entry into Eibar (Segala 1938: 80). Reprinted with the permission of the *Corriere della Sera*.

disorganization of its life and the annihilation of its wealth' (1938: 9). The spectacle of the ravaged towns of northern Spain presented a graphic picture of the effects of Bolshevism: the photographs of Eibar and Guernica imply a pleasure in destruction at the same time as they suggest, quite literally, the death of a nation.

It may be argued that photographs of ruined towns and cities characterize the reporting of any modern war and indeed that in the democratic press images of the Condor Legion's bombing of Guernica served the purpose of representing the true face of Fascism. More specific to the Spanish Civil War and fully exploited by the Italian press were the images of violence perpetrated against the institutions of the Catholic Church. The desecration of religious icons was, in the view of Piovene, not only proof of the godless materialism of the Republicans; it provided a further indication of their essential sadism. Reporting from Vitoria on the damage done to the artistic heritage of northern Spain, he suggested that the 'cemeteries of mutilated statues' reflected a desire not so much to destroy venerated artifacts as to inflict physical torture. In his enumeration of the 'quality of the mutilations' he pointed to eyes having been 'pulled out, heads cut off, hands removed at the wrists' (Piovene 1938d). The same emphasis on the brutality displayed towards objects of worship is to be found in one of the most resolutely Christian interpretations of the war, Lilli's *Racconti di una guerra*. In the Catalan



Figure 5.3. Guernica after the bombardment (Segala 1938: 108). Reprinted with the permission of the *Corriere della Sera*.

town of Borjas Blancas the local church is described as being reduced to a pigsty (1988: 56) and indirectly it stands as a metaphor for the filth and disorder that Lilli believes Enrique Lister's retreating army represented. Following the 'liberation' of Madrid, he asserted what he considered the true extent of the Republican assault against the Catholic Church:

Si fucilavano le Madonne, si bruciavano gli altari e i cori, si accoltellavano i santi Apostoli dipinti sulle tele bruniti dall'incenso. Le chiese si empivano di falci e martelli, di sigle bolsceviche e di manifesti che dicevano: Nostra patria è il Messico, nostra madre chiesa è la Russia. (Lilli 1988: 154)

[They would shoot statues of the Madonna, burn altars and choirs, knife paintings of the Apostles on canvas aged by the smoke of incense. Churches were filled with hammers and sickles, Bolshevik emblems and slogans like: 'Our homeland is Mexico', 'Our mother Church is Russia'.]

Images of desecrated churches, in common with those of ruined Spanish towns, were a staple of accounts of the war published by Italian correspondents.

In her essays on photography, Susan Sontag argues that while photographs do not in themselves explain anything – their meaning being dependent on the context in which they are inserted – they are 'inexhaustible invitations to deduction, speculation and fantasy' (1979: 23). The pictures of decapitated figures of the Madonna, burnt out transepts or disfigured altars in Seville or Barcelona certainly allowed the viewer to make all kinds of inferences [Figure 5.4]. Most obviously, the photographs of ruined churches provided evidence of fanatical hatred for the objects of Christian veneration. But the war's ideological conflict is represented here in the visual language of a nightmare where the nature of the damage that has been inflicted on the religious artifacts implicitly associates Communism with Satan. Most journalists who went to Spain were fond of defining the conflict as a war of religion and of referring to the areas of the country still held by the government as 'the inferno of red Spain'. Images of an onslaught against Christianity played a significant part in bolstering interpretations of this kind. Perhaps the most important inference that the photographs of destroyed churches invited their viewer to draw was of a potential similarity between the reality of Spain and Italy. No great leap of the imagination was required to see the fabric of local churches in damaged places of worship in Spain and to gain a sense that what was happening there could also happen in Italy.²³

In his writings on Spain, Sciascia draws attention to the striking degree to which the Italian national dailies echoed and reinforced the interpretation of the Civil War that predominated in the Catholic press (Lilli 1988: 175–76; Sciascia 1988): arguably the conflict in Spain was

the moment when Catholicism and Fascism saw in each other reflections of themselves.²⁴ Concentrating on the situation in Spain rather than on the fortunes of the *Corpo Truppe Volontarie*, the *Osservatore Romano* provided almost daily bulletins from the Nationalist front line. It printed excerpts from Franco's speeches from his headquarters in Salamanca and from the radio broadcasts of General Queipo de Llano. The emphasis for the Vatican's newspaper was not on a triumphant resolution to the Civil War but on the gravity of the challenge to Christian civilization. From July 1936 the *Osservatore Romano* carried news of destruction wrought against the institutional fabric of the Church in Spain – on 30 July 1936 (p. 3) it printed three photographs of devastated churches in Barcelona with the heading 'Il furore satanico dei senza Dio' [The Satanic fury of the Godless]. By August Republican Spain was being described as a 'theatre of horrors' (20 August 1936), offering 'terrifying pictures of blood, fire, devastation and ruin' (30 August 1936). For the Catholic press the war in Spain represented the most graphic instance of a larger struggle between Communism and Christianity. The *Osservatore* regularly published articles looking at different parts of the globe but equally concerned with enumerating the effects of Communist rule both on individuals and on entire countries.²⁵ On 19 March 1937, as Italian troops were coming under the full force of the counter-offensive at



Figure 5.4. Picture of a ruined Spanish Church (Segala 1938: 76). Reprinted with the permission of the *Corriere della Sera*.

Guadalajara, it printed Pius XI's encyclical 'Divini Redemptoris' with its invitation to all men to resist the advance of Communism. With particular reference to Spain, the encyclical referred to 'the Communist plague' raging through the country with 'furious violence' intent on destroying, through hatred and barbarity, every trace of Christian civilization. The fear was reiterated that what was happening in Spain could soon be replicated in one 'civilized nation' after another.

It was not only the ruins of buildings and churches but the cost in human life that many of the correspondents found staggering. Every reporter sent to Spain was confronted both with the unexpected extent of the carnage and the problem of representing either through words or images the after-effects of the ferocious battles of the Civil War or the reprisals of both sides. In a kind of postscript to *Racconti di una guerra*, Lilli reflected on the inability of his photographs of the war's dead to convey an adequate sense of the experience of following the front (1988: 167). On returning to Rome after having covered the war in the north for ten months, Sorrentino maintained that he and his fellow journalists had grown used to seeing piles of men who had been 'shot down like human ribbons' (1939: 235) but that the stench of death had proved overpowering and something against which no one could become inured (1939: 176). In his view, Spain had become an inferno or a 'land of death' and for the average Spaniard life was simply a 'polemical way of confronting death' (1939: 178).²⁶ Similarly for Piovene, the scale of the killing was such that it was possible to give an idea of the reality of Spain only through metaphor. In his words, to come to Spain was to enter a 'tragedy where individual protagonists lose any relief and disappear against a magnificently bloody backcloth' (1938b: 1). Perhaps the most revealing moments in the contemporary accounts of the war are those instances where the writer observes the aftermath of violence. In representing the death of sympathizers of the Republic, Italian journalists were, as Sciascia suggested, forced to come to terms with their own political or religious identities but they also indicated how far they themselves had succeeded in dehumanizing the enemies of Fascism. Though every reporter subscribed to and perpetuated a common interpretation of the war, individual responses to the evidence of suffering and sacrifice showed a wide degree of variation.

Of all the correspondents working in Spain, Alessandro Volta was the most confident in his belief that the opposing side conformed entirely to the negative stereotype created by Nationalist propaganda. His text on the Civil War, *Spagna a ferro e fuoco* (1937), obeyed a simple narrative structure. On the one hand, it represented, through writing supported by a series of closely related photographs (1937: 37, 53, 180) evidence of

atrocities committed by both anarchists and Communists in central and southern Spain. On the other hand, it documented the violent revenge that was, in the author's opinion, justly wreaked on the 'bestial Marxist rabble' (1937: 199). Volta was certainly not alone in documenting the details of punishment meted out against supposed subversives. While Koestler's *Spanish Testament* had been written in the shadow of the shootings in Seville's model prison, many Italian journalists referred to the invitation to witness the execution of prisoners. Ruinas described seeing the shooting of two anarchists from Asturias in the courtyard in the prison of Seville and reflected on the stoicism and defiance they showed at the moment of their deaths (1940: 118). In a piece of writing close to the kind of sensational journalism for which Curzio Malaparte was famous, Sorrentino, also in Seville, described a visit to see a twenty-year old woman charged with spying for the Republic and due to be executed the following morning (1939: 167).²⁷ Unlike Ruinas or Sorrentino, Volta displayed little interest in the individuality of captured prisoners and his representation of summary killings excluded any sense of compassion. The text presented the action of rebel firing squads as necessary and sanctioned by the highest order: to witness the killing of prisoners was to see justice at work and order being restored. In the small town of Montoro, close to Malaga on the Andalusian front, Volta described the following scene:

Otto miliziani cecoslovacchi ... furono immediatamente portati sulla piazza e allineati davanti al plotone di esecuzione: 'Un giorno l'Europa sarà grata alla Spagna di averla liberata dai rifiuti sociali affluiti qui dai bassofondi di tutti i paesi', mi disse il cappellano militare quando giustizia fu fatta. Su quella stessa piazza, segnata ancora da una vastissima pozza di sangue, fu celebrata a mezzogiorno la messa di Natale. (Volta 1937: 213)

[Eight Czech militiamen ... were immediately brought to the square and lined up in front of the firing squad. When justice had been done, the military chaplain told me: 'One day Europe will be grateful to Spain for having liberated it from the social refuse that have come here from the slums of every country'. In the same square, still marked by an enormous lake of blood, at midday, Mass for Christmas was celebrated.]

Other correspondents, while never questioning the objectives of the war on Communism, rarely represented the dead of the opposing side with the same total lack of humanity. Writing for the *Corriere*, both Lilli and Piovene showed some interest in the life stories of the troops opposing the Nationalist advance into Aragon and Catalonia. Both described in detail the boy soldiers sent to the front (Piovene 1938a; Lilli 1988: 60–73) and both sought to gain a sense of the lives of the Republican dead by reading letters found in the squalor of deserted trenches (Piovene 1938a; Lilli 1988: 43–47). In one of the most carefully constructed of his 'stories', Lilli described, as he and a colleague travelled towards the front,

discovering a wallet belonging to a British member of the International Brigades. From its contents (a photograph of its owner, his wife and children, a driving licence, the receipt for a piano) Lilli attempted to recreate the life story of Frank J. Th. from Liverpool (1988: 117–18). He speculated on his identity as husband and father, suggesting that: ‘He was not a fallen soldier or a dead militiaman, he was not an enemy’. The ‘story’ ends as Lilli and his friend come face to face with the corpse of the militiaman and return the wallet, in an act of pity, to its owner.

The narration replaces the stereotype of the enemy with an ordinary human being and displays a sense of Christian compassion operating at a deeper level than the enmity between Fascist and Communist. But perhaps more striking is the reproduction of the diary of a dead militiawoman in Sorrentino’s account of his experiences in Spain (1939: 103–22). The diary describes the last weeks in the life of its unnamed author: she enrolled, with several of her friends, in the militia in Barcelona and died defending Majorca for the Republic (August–September 1936). Sorrentino maintains that Conte Aldo Rossi gave him the diary during his stay in Majorca on route to mainland Spain. Though it is impossible to verify the authenticity of the journal, it is unlikely that Sorrentino would have possessed either the imagination or the knowledge of life behind Republican lines to have been able to write the kind of detailed account that is presented in the diary. However the diary came to be reproduced, it is one of the few instances in the officially sanctioned literature on the Spanish Civil War where one hears a voice, whether fictional or real, from the other side of the ideological divide. In recording her recollections of the early part of the war, the author gives a picture of the motivation of the militias that contrasts sharply with the reductive image of the Republic repeatedly presented in much of the Italian press. She also gives an insight into the atmosphere of food shortages, organizational problems and growing disillusion within the militias. Yet, the most interesting feature of the diary, given the context in which it was printed, is its conscious and direct defence of women’s rights. The militiawoman points to the patriarchal nature of Spanish society, the contribution of women to the war effort, despite the hostility of elements on the same side, and the hope of a better future. Towards the end of her diary she writes: ‘In our lives we see clearly that women are everyday disturbed and hindered in the paths that they wish to follow’ (1939: 120). Sorrentino’s reprinting of the diary is all the more remarkable given that in many other accounts of the war photographs of women fighters are used as an example of a barbarous challenge to traditional gender distinctions brought about by anarchism and Communism in Spain.

Italian Intervention

If the Spanish Civil War was represented in the Italian press as an epic struggle between good and evil, then Franco's forces were depicted with a degree of acclamation that inversely corresponded to the denigration heaped on the Loyalists. Likewise, while those areas of Spain that were still under the control of the democratically elected government were characterized as hell on earth, the areas of the country that had submitted to the rebellion were defined as the epitome of order. In the course of following the progress of the war in its different theatres all Italian journalists made lengthy journeys through the regions of Nationalist Spain. As they did so they wrote on the components of Franco's army and gave some perception of life immediately behind the front line. Segala (1938), for example, gave a long description of the fighting qualities of the army of Africa, while Volta (1937: 43–65) and Sandri (1937c) wrote in detail on the mentality of the staunchly Catholic *Requetés*. Covering the assault on Catalonia, Piovene evoked the atmosphere among soldiers' relatives in Zaragoza (1938e), while many of Lilli's reports from Spain, written quite self-consciously as stories, focused on the war's casualties. In one of the most effective examples of the 'corrispondenza-racconto' [report-story], 'Vengono dal fronte' [They come from the front] (Lilli 1988: 27–31), he describes a car journey from Pamplona to Zaragoza that is interrupted when his Spanish driver stops to help repair another car, which has broken down in the pouring rain.²⁸ While the driver works on the engine, the narrator observes the occupants of the other car, especially the two women huddled in the back as they struggle against the freezing cold. He also observes the large trunk strapped to the roof of the car, covered with a grey tarpaulin and soaking wet. He watches as the older of the two women insists that one of the two men checks that the tarpaulin is properly strapped to the roof and is not becoming excessively soiled by the journey. Only when his driver returns to the car does the narrator realize that what he has taken for a trunk is the body of a dead soldier that his relatives are taking home, strapped to the roof of the car, for burial in Pamplona. Without realizing, the reporter has been staring at the grieving mother and wife of the dead soldier. The shock of the transition from one perception to another provokes in both narrator and reader a sensation of difference – a sensation that has its own peculiar quality and is used by Lilli as his introduction to his *racconti* of the Civil War.

Descriptions of journeys through areas of the country occupied by rebel forces were not intended only to produce a picture of sacrifice and mourning; their primary function was to give an account of what was being defended by Italian intervention. By suggesting that the

Nationalists were fighting in order to maintain the traditions of the past, the narrated journeys through Franco's Spain gave a sense of the reactionary nature of Fascist priorities. Stanis Ruinas claimed that the optimal moment to write a comprehensive study of a country was at a time of war (1940: 194) and his *Vecchia e nuova Spagna* was written, apparently incongruously, as a travelogue. Like the writer of a guidebook on Spain, Ruinas informed his reader of the history of each of the places that he visited; he described the monuments of the towns where he stayed and the lives of their distinguished former inhabitants. In the cathedral of La Palma he visited the tomb of Ramón Lull (1940: 109), on his journey to Avila he narrated the life story of Saint Theresa (1940: 162) and when in Burgos he described the heroics of El Cid (1940: 156–57). In common with many of the Italian travelogues published before the outbreak of civil war (Zilani 1927; Cipolla 1928; Praz 1928, Puccini 1938), he sought to identify the complex of institutions, morals and modes of behaviour that in his view constituted the spirit of the Spanish 'race'.²⁹ He frequently implied a similarity between the physical features of a region's landscape and the mental attributes of its inhabitants, and maintained that whole communities inherited the same outlook or aspirations.³⁰ In visiting the sacred sites of the nation, the tombs of its poets, philosophers, martyrs and soldiers, Ruinas repeated the irrational but suggestive notion that the whole weight of an age-old culture was on the rebel side and that in some ghostly or surreal fashion the *Requetés*, Moors and Legionaries of Franco's army were the modern incarnation of medieval heroes engaged in the reconquest of Spain. This kind of assertion was by no means unique to Ruinas. Many Italian journalists were prone to describing the actions of the Nationalist leaders by reference to emblematic figures or events from the past: the insurgent advance was a new crusade; the political associations sustaining the government side were all forms of heresy; the Caudillo was a modern version of El Cid (Volta 1937: 103; Ruinas 1940: 159).

It has become something of a truism in criticism of travel writing to state that any piece of writing on a different country, produced under whatever circumstances, tells us as much about the culture of its writer as it does about the place that is visited. In texts that trace Italian intervention in Spain and that served the explicit purpose of documenting, if not to say parading, the successes of the Fascist war machine, it is hardly surprising that the reality of the Civil War was understood only through constant references to and comparisons with Mussolini's Italy. Though many Italian journalists may have been struck by the carnage that they witnessed at the front or prepared to acknowledge the heterogeneous character of Franco's army, they were nevertheless ready to see the inspiration of Italian Fascism

in the Falange's corporativist principles and in its regimentation of social life (Caprile 1937; Volta 1937: 61; Pettinato 1939: 75; Sorrentino 1939: 14). To a degree, the identification with the Falange concealed the contradiction of a supposedly revolutionary regime supporting a coalition of highly reactionary authoritarians. Similarly, in the descriptions of audiences with Franco, which occur in almost all collections of articles on Spain, the rebel leader is, as one might expect, presented with the same type of language that characterized evocations of the Duce. Franco was presented as an 'authentic leader' (Volta 1937: 107; Pettinato 1939: 13) whose physical bearing and mental attributes displayed all the 'essential qualities of his people' (Segala 1938: 127; Ruinas 1940: 159). Even Sorrentino's criticism of his unwillingness to address crowds of his followers implied a contrast with Mussolini's fabled ability to enthuse throngs of supporters in the squares of major Italian towns (1939: 26).³¹ Apart from witnessing another nation state in crisis and making inevitable comparisons between the organizations and leaders of Nationalist Spain and those of their own country, Italian correspondents also represented, both explicitly and implicitly, a vision of elements of the Italian nation.

As in reporting on the conquest of Ethiopia, it was the foot soldier, defined as the legionary or volunteer,³² in whom journalists of the national dailies saw the clearest reflection of the qualities that the regime identified as those of the nation. In his journeys from one region of Spain to another, Ruinas was, as he did not tire of reminding his reader, engaged in a parallel search for the soul of the Italian nation. His search achieved its object when he wrote on the Italian expeditionary force. In Valladolid he visited the cemetery where the Italian legionaries were buried and was drawn to the military hospital where the casualties of Guadalajara had been taken (1940: 143–51). In this 'austere building', listening to the stories of the wounded and watching the effects of radio transmissions as they were broadcast in the wards, he professed to feeling more than in any other place the nearness of the spirit of 'la Patria' (1940: 145). Without being able to match the same degree of pomposity, Piovene wrote a series of articles in the spring of 1938 on the heroism of ordinary Italian soldiers, listing the values that, in his view, were represented by the *Corpo Volontario* (Piovene 1938a; 1938b; 1938c). Such values included the simplicity of the troops' devotion to the cause for which they were fighting, their indifference to hardship or personal injury and their concern for the well-being of their fellow soldiers. The values which Piovene identified were more or less the same that Luigi Barzini Sr. (1940) extolled in his work on Italian legionaries in Spain. Writing on the conquest of Santander, Segala (1938: 220) wrote of the Nation's pride in its 'magnificent soldiers', while Ruinas, describing the same event, drew

a familiar parallel between the contemporary Italian presence in Spain and the example of ancient Rome – affirming that the exploits of the Mussolini's Blackshirts had surpassed those of Augustus' legionaries (1940: 166).³³

There is no reason to doubt that the majority of journalists who wrote on Spain were genuinely moved or impressed by the courage and stoicism they witnessed among Italian troops. Writing more than fifty years after the conflict, Artieri recalled the lives of soldiers he had known personally and who had been killed in action (1995: 185), and other correspondents recorded similar feelings of grief (Lajolo 1937; Lilli 1988: 77–84). Yet, the language used by the newspapers of the time to characterize the attitude of front-line troops tended to view the individual soldier simply as the vehicle through which abstract qualities supposedly belong to the collective found expression. As in all aspects of Fascist culture, the evocation of the relationship between the leader and his subjects acted as a means not only of suggesting an identity of vision and purpose between the two, it also served as a means of glorifying both. The march into Santander occurred at the same time as Mussolini was undertaking his triumphal journey through the major towns of Sicily (August 1937). The symmetry of the two events was not lost on the Italian press (see Sciascia 1988: 53–54). Barzini, reporting the victory parade in Santander, described Italian troops attaching pictures of the Duce to their tunics as they marched through the town (1937). The idea of the 'volunteers' in Spain echoing or responding to the imperatives of their leader was expressed most strikingly by the reactions published by *Il Popolo d'Italia* to Mussolini's article 'Guadalajara' (1937). Throughout July and August 1937 the paper published enthusiastic responses by individual soldiers to the interpretation of the battle given by the Duce. The notion of the troops as the crowd to which Mussolini's written speech had been addressed was reinforced by the publication of extracts from the letters of soldiers writing home – all expressing unquestioning commitment to the cause – and photographs of Blackshirts recently killed on the front.

Appearing more or less at the same time as the column 'Lettere di Legionari' were the articles of Davide Lajolo (1937a and b) – soldier, reporter and self-appointed voice of the CVT in the pages of *Il Popolo d'Italia*. In one of the most fervently worded of his reports from the front he claimed that the soldiers fighting in Spain experienced the same passion that Mussolini's followers had felt in the March on Rome and that Guadalajara had been the ground for which Fascism had prepared its adherents. He ended his piece with a vow to avenge the fallen of Guadalajara and to transform the battlefield into an altar and sacrarium of the Italian volunteer force: 'so that our Leader, who is always near us

... may be satisfied with us and we worthy of him – he for whom we know how to die and for whom we will always live' (Lajolo 1937a). The rhetorical exaltation of the ordinary soldier in the national press was merely a part of the regime's ritualization both of the war and of those who fought on the Nationalist side. As the number of Italian casualties mounted all major newspapers carried lists of the dead under high sounding titles such as the 'Register of Glory in Spain' or the 'Fallen in the War against Communism and for Fascist Civilization'.³⁴ On 24 June 1937, the *Corriere della Sera* gave notification that the dead of the war would be honoured in the memorial chapels of Fascism: the honour bestowed upon the fallen confirmed their identity, along with the dead of the Great War and the Ethiopian campaign, as martyrs. The assumption of the dead of the war into an officially orchestrated system of worship was further established through the commemorative celebrations officiated by the Duce on Rome's Altar to the Patria.³⁵

The symbolic treatment of the dead and wounded of the war in Spain may have been akin to that reserved for the heroic dead of the First World War and the conquest of Ethiopia, though such treatment differed in the degree to which it incorporated elements of Roman Catholicism. Though principally the symbols of the Fascist values of aggression and obedience, the soldiers of the CTV were, in the writing of one correspondent after another, presented as the armed defenders of the faith. In the context of photographs of *Requetés* receiving the sacrament before battle or of Spanish priests making the Fascist salute, correspondents were keen to stress that Italian intervention was part of the same crusade against Communism and that the religious devotion they witnessed among Franco's troops was shared by Italian soldiers. In the eyes of most reporters, aspects of the behaviour of ordinary soldiers indicated the dual existence of Christian and Fascist beliefs. In the military hospital of Valladolid, Ruinas was struck by examples of the most hardened soldiers grasping sacred images with intense and emotional devoutness (1940: 146). A more subtle and less typical elision of the cult of the military with the representation of a more established system of worship is to be found in Lilli's *racconto-articolo*, 'Freccia nera' [Black arrow] (1988: 37–42). The piece describes the sight of a dead soldier (initially it is uncertain whether he is Spanish or Italian) lying by the side of the road as the front advanced towards Lleida. The soldier's corpse, left unburied from one day to another and in changing states of decomposition, serves as the subject of different representations. In death the body assumes the attributes of a marble statue (1988: 39) as the writing suggests a transition from human being to symbol of military sacrifice and by so doing implies a concept of the afterlife of the military hero. But more explicit is the Christian notion of death and rebirth as Lilli

speculates on the passage of the soldier from this world to the next and imagines a silent communication that takes place between the soldier and his God during the days that he lies unburied (1988: 40).³⁶

If it is true that Italian correspondents in Spain represented the Civil War as a clash of religions or as the defence of civilization against barbarism, then underlying this representation was a narrative of the march of Fascism towards ultimate victory. Defeat at Guadalajara was, at least in part, the result of the haste with which the regime had set its sights on securing a dramatic end to the war that would announce to the world the irresistibility of its power. With the exception of the disaster to the north-east of Madrid, the repetition of the idea of a glorious march through Spain was a staple of reporting both in the printed media and in the newsreels of the time (Giraudó 1997). Reporters for the Italian dailies were employed to witness the spectacle of victory – a spectacle that obeyed its own narrative logic. The pack of correspondents would often be among the first to enter a town evacuated by the Republican retreat, they would wait for the arrival of Nationalist or Italian troops, then describe the scenes of joy as the advance guard approached. Lastly, they would report on the victory parade that inevitably followed. Describing the atmosphere in Malaga shortly before the entry of the main body of the CTV, Benedetti (1937) wrote of being mobbed by overjoyed men and women, ‘as if I myself had liberated the town’. When reporting on the parade of Italian soldiers through Santander, Segala (1937b) wrote of the ‘apotheosis’ of the legionaries. Celebrations and official acts of thanksgiving in Italy echoed the rhythm of one triumph after another that was more or less maintained in the Italian press. On 20 October 1938 ten thousand Italian troops returning from Cadiz disembarked at Naples where, under the eyes of the King, they paraded through the city’s streets (Coverdale 1975: 371). In Spain Italian reporters recorded the aftermath of victory through descriptions of towns and cities awakening from what they characterized as the nightmare of Communist rule. Towards the end of 1938 Segala wrote from Burgos under the rubric ‘Towards the new Spain’, while the title of Ruinas’ book, *Vecchia e nuova Spagna* [Old and New Spain] (1940), implied that Franco’s new Spain would arise from the deep-rooted traditions of the country.

Conclusion

The correspondence of those journalists who covered the Spanish Civil War for the Italian press was written under certain forms of surveillance: reports from the front were submitted to the official censor for approval and were then further scrutinized by the editorial authority of each

newspaper.³⁷ The extent to which reporters believed in the accuracy of their interpretation of the conflict is therefore difficult to assess and can only be known partially by piecing together reflections made by the journalists themselves in the years following the collapse of Fascism and the end of the Second World War. A related question concerns that of the nature of individual writers' allegiance to the regime. Already within the apparently uniform representation of the conflict, shifting levels of personal investment are threaded into what was almost always presented simply as observation. Through occasional and for the most part inadvertent admissions, Lilli gives a sense of himself in his writing as an established member of Rome's bourgeoisie, as a Catholic and as a conservative. A sense of defending an existing order against the possibility of radical subversion pervades his writing and defines his support for Italian intervention in Spain. The relative complexity of his position contrasts with that adopted by Stanis Ruinas who, proud of his Sardinian origins and describing himself as a 'man of the people' (1940: 249), rarely missed an opportunity to affirm his identity as a committed follower of Mussolini and, apparently untroubled by the support for conservative authoritarianism in Spain, his view of Fascism as a working class revolt against the standards of the middle classes.

In collections of autobiographical reflections that have appeared at different stages in the decades since the end of the Civil War, a similarly wide spectrum of beliefs concerning the legitimacy of Italian action in Spain is to be found: a spectrum which reflects the fact that many journalists enjoyed lengthy and successful careers beyond 1945.³⁸ As late as 1995, in one of his many books of popular history, Giovanni Artieri, addressing the question as to what extent the correspondents of the time had identified with the regime, suggested that for the majority little difference existed between a feeling of loyalty to the Italian state and loyalty to Fascism (Artieri 1995: 220). He also repeated, almost word for word, the interpretation of Italian intervention in Spain that had served as the mantra of the 1930s. In his view, reiterated over fifty years after the conflict, 'the authority of Order' (1995: 221) had triumphed over the forces of chaos, Franco had won because he had represented the 'immortal soul of Spain' (1995: 220) and Mussolini's generous supply of arms and troops had served no other purpose than to guarantee 'the freedom of Europe from Communism' (1995: 222). The unshakeability of his confidence in the role that Italy had performed, and by implication his and his colleagues' reporting of the event, should be contrasted with other recorded memories where the relationship between the writing self of the past and present is far more problematic. Guido Piovene, looking back on his career at the *Corriere della Sera*, referred to the necessity of

writing copy the falsity of which was approved both by the editor and by the other journalists on the staff (1975: 39–42). His evocation of the five months he spent as a war correspondent reporting from the Aragon front (1975: 213–22) from the autumn of 1938 focused on impressions of violence and destruction while supplying details lacking in his original reports.³⁹ Though the later account fell short of addressing the contradictions inherent in Italian support for Franco, it did refer unequivocally to the evident but unacknowledged purges that took place in the wake of the Nationalist advance into the north-east of Spain (1975: 219) and the climate of silence that surrounded them. A feeling of having been professionally compromised by the actions of the past did erupt occasionally in the text with statements such as: ‘The few who were able to write on our side, after their servile falsifications, became ashamed or kept their silence so as to let their stupidity be forgotten’ (1975: 213–14).

In Piovene’s later and rather brief recollections the accent was on a sense of having falsified reality, while in Lajolo’s more extended account of involvement in Spain (1977) the emphasis lay more clearly on a sense of remorse.⁴⁰ The first person of *Veder l’erba dalla parte delle radici* [To See the Grass from its Roots Upwards] is both different from and haunted by the figure who emerged from the bellicose rhetoric of Lajolo’s articles for *Il Popolo d’Italia* with their insistence on personal sacrifice and their desire to please the Duce at all costs. In the later text the memory of the past, making unbidden inroads into consciousness (in particular, the shellfire and the freezing conditions of Guadalajara), acts as an invitation to self-judgement. Though speaking of the conviction of many of the troops that through their action in Spain they were bringing liberation from anarchy and from Bolshevik terror (1977: 42), Lajolo remembers the degree to which the soldiers of the CTV were susceptible to the claims of the regime’s propaganda and its belligerent slogans. The memory of the nightmare of Guadalajara, as it is represented in *Veder l’erba*, causes the reflection that the opposing side were not prey to the ‘deceit of Fascism’ and were fighting for ‘la libertà vera’ [true freedom] (1977: 39).⁴¹ Luigi Barzini Sr., writing for the same newspaper as Lajolo and who perhaps more than any other correspondent was responsible for presenting the CTV as a committed and heroic force, did not live long enough to write either a major reaffirmation of his faith in Fascism or a reassessment of his personal involvement in the *ventennio* – he died in September 1947. Yet, even he wrote two reserved letters to Mussolini in the summer of 1938 on the demoralized state of Italian troops in Spain and on Franco’s unwillingness to secure a swift end to the conflict (Melograni 1965: 31).

If the question of the degree to which the Italian correspondents who followed the war believed in the veracity of their own reporting is complex, then the reception of their writing among the Italian public is even more difficult to assess, it being a question that historiography has not fully explored.⁴² Clearly an analysis of the Italian public's responses to war in Spain as it was reported in the national press lies beyond the scope of this chapter but, by way of conclusion, it is worth pointing to Sciascia's views on the subject. For Sciascia the recollection of the events of the Civil War was a memory of the way in which those events were relayed to a public with no knowledge that a sizeable group of Italians of differing political persuasions were ranged against the divisions of the CTV or that the Republic offered an example of popular resistance to Fascism. In the late 1980s Sciascia wrote of reading about the battles of the Civil War as a boy in his late teens in Sicily, of being convinced of the objectivity of the reporting in the press and of the rightness of Franco and Italian intervention (Sciascia 1988: 46). Suggesting that most people were entirely convinced of the legitimacy of Italian support for Franco (1988: 53), he also described the correspondence of Virgilio Lilli, with its strongly Catholic undertones, its sense of the necessary defence of order, yet its horror at the cost in human lives as nothing less than: 'testimonianza del sentire della maggior parte degli italiani di fronte alla guerra spagnola' [testimony of the feelings of the majority of Italians with regard to the war in Spain] (Lilli 1988: 181). Yet, though Sciascia implied in *Ore di Spagna* (1988) that the majority of Italians were prepared to accept the simplified and, to a large extent, allegorical vision of the war that was transmitted through the news media of the time, he also pointed to ways in which the intended reception of the vision of a righteous crusade against the excesses of Communism could be subverted and how his own naïve experiences of reading changed over the years of the war's duration. Despite the efforts of the regime to silence or minimize the defeat of its troops in March 1937, he remembered the proliferation of cautious rumours and whispers of Guadalajara (1988: 54). Yet, his most revealing observation did not concern the circulation of rumours in his native Sicily so much as the way in which hearsay, snippets of information gleaned from returning soldiers, observable realities like the 'conscription' of volunteers or the *podestà* informing a local family of the death of a serving soldier (1988: 52) encouraged an awareness of a different kind of conflict, an awareness that could be brought to the biased reporting from the front. He wrote of the possibility of reading the reports of those correspondents who followed the war from one theatre of action to another not as they were intended to be read but *against* themselves – or to use his words 'in un certo modo' (1988: 52) –

and of developing an interpretation of events which, though it derived from the officially sanctioned version of the war, was at odds with it.⁴³

Notes

1. For details of Hemingway's journalism, see the 1938 edition of his work. Koestler's account of his time in Spain (1937: 17–20) gives details of his reporting for the *News Chronicle*. Piers Brendon chronicles how the editor of the *New Statesman* refused to print Orwell's articles on Spain (2000: 342).
2. A brief history of Capa and Taro's photography during the Civil War is to be found in Preston 2001. Labanyi's analysis of women photographers in Spain (2002) discusses the ability of photography to represent the lives of ordinary people living through the catastrophe.
3. Burgess' comments are printed on the cover of the 1999 edition of the novel.
4. In Britain, representations of the Spanish Civil War have included the extended television documentary in the early 1980s (Mitchell 1982), Ken Loach's film *Land and Freedom* (1995) and, most recently, the exhibition at the Imperial War Museum, 'The Spanish Civil War: Dreams and Nightmares' (Preston 2001).
5. The reporting of the Civil War by journalists working in Fascist Italy represented, of course, only one facet of Italian involvement. For many anti-Fascists, including such names as Pietro Nenni and Palmiro Togliatti, Spain represented the opportunity to confront the regime through armed struggle: the Garibaldi Battalion, part of the International Brigades, played a significant part in the defence of the Republic – most notably at Guadalajara. For an extremely detailed bibliography of works on the Civil War published by Italians (writing at different times and in different ideological perspectives), see Torcellan (1988).
6. Though he survived Spain, Massai was later killed in an aircraft accident in 1939 during the inauguration of the new line between Rome and Rio de Janeiro (Licata 1976: 609).
7. In her preface to the collected articles of her father (Lilli 1988: 12–13), Laura Lilli makes the point that although her father considered himself a foreign correspondent, he was for much of the 1930s and 1940s a war reporter, covering first Ethiopia, then Spain, then Greece and finally Russia.
8. Sorrentino ended his book on Spain with a letter to his dead fellow correspondent (1939: 353–69), while Renzo Segala (1938) dedicated his collection of articles on the Civil War to Sandri.
9. Barzini's career as a war correspondent had involved the Russo-Japanese war 1904–1905, the conquest of Libya in 1911, and various theatres of action in the First World War. He was an early convert to Fascism. Coverdale (1975: 157) points out that Mussolini was keen to read the dispatches Barzini sent from the front during the war in Spain.
10. *Il legionario* was founded in March 1937 by Guglielmo Danzi. Journalists working for the paper included Buonaventura Caloro, Lamberto Sorrentino, Raffaello Patuelli, Giuseppe Valentini, Gian Gaspare Napolitano, Sandro Sandri and Mario Massai. For a history of the paper, together with that of *Il Garibaldino*,

the journal of Italian volunteers fighting in the International Brigades, see Corti and Pizarróso (1993).

11. Emma Barzini was married to the Spanish airforce officer, Alessandro Gomez Spencer. The outbreak of the Civil War caught the two in Madrid by surprise and they were compelled to spend the duration of the conflict on the Republican side of the front.
12. Figures for the composition of these forces are given by Coverdale (1975: 175). By February 1937 the total number of Italian ground troops shipped to Spain had reached almost 49,000. Of these, 40% formed part of the army; the other 60% were from the Fascist militia. The soldiers fighting in Spain were organized into four purely Italian divisions that formed the *Corpo Truppe Volontarie* (CTV). As Coverdale observes (183), the question of the origin of Blackshirt volunteers is complex. The group's high average age and low social-economic status seem to point clearly to economic necessity as the primary motives for volunteering.
13. Ugo D'Andrea (1937a; 1937b; 1938), writing in *Il Mediterraneo*, provides a good example of contemporary justifications for Italian intervention in Spain.
14. On the role of the Garibaldi battalion in the counter-attack on Brihuega and on the participation of Carlos Contreras, Luigi Longo and Pietro Nenni, see Thomas (1961: 385). Mitchell (1982: 87) gives the figures for the rout of Roatta's troops as 3,000 dead, nearly 1,000 captured and 4,000 wounded. Thomas gives the figures as 2,000 killed with 300 prisoners (1961: 387).
15. Thomas reports that Mussolini is reputed to have said that no Italian was to return from Spain alive until Guadalajara had been avenged (1961: 388). For a different perception of Mussolini's reaction to the Italian defeat, see Bottai (1982: 116–17).
16. The news that the destruction of Guernica was carried out by 'the reds' was repeated in the *Osservatore Romano* on 1 May 1937.
17. For an account of the battles of Brunete and the Ebro, see Thomas (1961: 460–65, 554–62); Brendon (2000: 343–48).
18. On that day the *Corriere* carried the following headlines: 'Vittoria Fascista: Disfatta del Bolscevismo' [Fascist victory: defeat of Bolshevism]; 'Le bandiere rosso-oro riconsacrano la metropoli' [Red and gold flags reconsecrate the metropolis]; 'Moltitudini in ginocchio rendono grazie per la liberazione' [Crowds kneel to give thanks for liberation].
19. Artieri (1937b: 1) was even more terse: 'Nelle regioni occupate da Franco ordine, lavoro, fiducia: nelle regioni rosse, incubo, disordine, terrore' [In the regions controlled by Franco: order, work, faith. In the parts of the country occupied by the reds: horror, disorder and terror].
20. General Belforte was the pseudonym of General Biondi-Mora of the Italian army historical office (Coverdale 1975: 246). On the subject of a war of religions, Alberto Spaini (1937) also wrote for *Il Mediterraneo*.
21. By way of example it is worth quoting Volta (1937: 112): 'Essendo diventato il generale Miaja una marionetta nelle loro mani, che si muoveva secondo come gli agenti di Mosca tiravano i fili' [General Miaja having become a puppet in their hands, one who moved in the direction in which agents from Moscow pulled the strings].
22. See the *Corriere della Sera*, 30 August 1938.

23. Quilici (1938: 57) gave the following figures for the persecution suffered by the Catholic Church in Spain: 11 out of 60 bishops killed; 17,000 priests killed out of a total of 45,000; 10,000 churches destroyed by February 1937.
24. A contemporary account of the closeness of Fascism to Catholicism is provided by Manacorda (1937), while a detailed analysis of Catholic responses to the war in Spain has been written by Campanini 1988. I do not agree with Coverdale's (1975: 266) argument that anticlerical element in Fascism was too strong to allow the party propaganda machine to make use of the religious issue.
25. A good example of this type of writing is the article signed F.C., 'Come si combatte il comunismo' (1937) with its claim that any non intervention against the brutality and delinquency of Communism was wholly unjust.
26. Sorrentino (1939: 178) gave the following figures for the death toll in Spain: 1,200,000 in a population of 24 million. In the light of such horrific figures, Sorrentino and other Italian observers were often ready to speculate on Spanish attitudes towards death. Piovene (1938a) wrote: 'E non è vero che i soldati spagnoli siano soldati che odiano fino alla ferocia il nemico. Soltanto guardandosi dentro sembra che stimino cosa da poca importanza il morire per se stessi e per gli altri' [It is not true that Spanish soldiers have a ferocious hatred towards the enemy. It is only when they look into themselves they consider their own death and that of other people to be of little importance].
27. In this horrifying section of his account of the Civil War (1939: 167), Sorrentino quotes the imprisoned Republican spy: "'Entonces", chiese di nuovo, "no quiere gozar?" No, desideravo vedere come diventa una donna prima di morire' ["Well then", she asked again, "do you want to have some fun?" No, I wanted to see what a woman is like before dying].
28. In the postscript to the collection's reprint nearly fifty years later, Sciascia drew attention to the use of a genre which he saw as unique to the war correspondent, that of the 'corrispondenza-racconto' (Lilli 1988: 178). The *racconto* was first published in the *Corriere della Sera* on 6 January 1939 with the title 'Automobile con baule lungo' [Car carrying a long trunk], p. 3.
29. Reflecting on his work as editor of *Il Legionario*, Ruinas wrote (1940: 248): 'Il mio vivo desiderio era quello di conoscere gli spagnoli, di vedere come vivevano, di sorprenderli nella intimità delle loro case' [My real desire was to get to know the Spanish people, to see how they lived, to surprise them in the intimacy of their homes].
30. Most commentators insisted on the different regional identities of the Spanish, often repeating the same clichés. Volta, when trying to account for the fierce resistance in the Asturias, gave the following melodramatic account of regional character: 'Gente che passa metà della loro vita nelle gallerie sotterranee per estrarre un minerale povero, dal rendimento scarsissimo che non consente una remunerazione adeguata alla dura fatica, costoro hanno finito per imbestialirsi e cancellare dal loro animo ogni sentimento umano' (1937: 74) [People who spend half their lives in underground tunnels trying to mine a mineral of poor quality that does not sell for much and which does not repay their hard work: they have become beast-like and have extinguished from their souls any human sentiment].
31. Sorrentino's negative assessment of Franco's ability to address throngs of supporters conformed to the views of Cantalupo and Farinacci (Coverdale 1975: 193).

32. Italian soldiers in Spain were consistently referred to as 'volunteers'.
33. Repeated in many of the books on the Civil War was the notion that Italian intervention in Spain was legitimated by the earlier presence of imperial Rome. Thus the description of Spanish culture was a way of indirectly characterizing the 'spirit' of ancient Rome, and following the advance of Mussolini's troops was a means of reliving an episode from the history of Rome. In the words of Ruinas (1940: 197): 'Tutta la civiltà spagnola è prevalentemente innestata sul tronco sempre rigoglioso della civiltà romana' [The whole of Spanish civilization is grafted on to the perennially strong trunk of Roman civilization]. For a more extended description on this theme, see Cardinali 1937 and Pariset 1940.
34. See the *Corriere della Sera*, 12 June 1937.
35. On 30 October 1937 the *Corriere della Sera* reported the celebration of the fallen in the war in Spain. The following figures were given: 763 dead, 2675 wounded. On the 2 February 1939 the paper ran the headline: 'Il Duce esalta sull'Altare della Patria l'eroismo dei legionari vittoriosi in Africa e in Spagna' [The Duce exalts on the Altar to the Nation the heroism of the victorious legionaries in Africa and Spain].
36. The article first appeared in the *Corriere della Sera* on 24 February 1939. In the preface to his text, Lilli imagines God looking down at the carnage in Spain and affirms unproblematically that He is on the side of the victors (1988: 24).
37. Licata (1976: 286–87) recounts how Indro Montanelli was required to return to Italy and struck off from the professional register of journalists for having reported that the surrender of Santander was not so much the result of the Italian offensive action as the inevitable outcome of the defenders lacking the munitions to continue to resist.
38. Segala, for example, was the editor of the daily *Tempo* from 1945 to 1946, and from 1947 to 1955 the editor of the weekly *Epoca*. After the war, Lilli worked for the *Corriere* until 1973 with short spells working also for *Tempo*, *Il Giornale della Sera* and *La Stampa* (Licata 1976: 603, 631–32).
39. The later work (1975: 215–16) gives details, for example, of the atmosphere in Zaragoza behind the Nationalist front line with thousands of women, widowed by the war, living in poverty and working as prostitutes. Such information is lacking from the earlier description of Zaragoza (Piovene 1938e).
40. The autobiography, *Veder l'erba dalla parte delle radici*, is written as Lajolo, recovering from a near fatal heart attack looks back at his life and his involvement with different ideologies and political parties. He refers not only to his early experiences in the Civil War but also to his subsequent journey from Right to Left, his ten years at the helm of *L'Unità* and his election to parliament.
41. Lajolo's reference to the Spanish Civil War as a kind of ideological awakening (1977: 53) points to the disaffection with Fascism that many figures who had been drawn to the movement experienced when Mussolini intervened on the side of Franco. On this subject, Coverdale (1975: 269) has written: 'Italian support for Franco dashed the last hopes of those in Italy and elsewhere in Europe who had hailed Fascism as a movement that could combine radical social reform with nationalism'.
42. The subject is addressed by Aquarone (1966) and Coverdale (1975). The more general question of memory and the war in Spain is addressed by Giannantoni, Paolucci and Ramella (2003).

43. Sciascia's well-known short story, 'L'Antimonio' (1958), like the later *Ore di Spagna* (with its journeys to the sites of the most ferocious battles fifty years after the conflict) represents a specifically Italian memory of the Spanish Civil War in the way that it represents narratively the difficulty of understanding the dynamics of the struggle and its human tragedy, hidden as they were by the rhetorical certainties of Fascist propaganda.

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Chapter 6

Representing Rapprochement with Nazi Germany

In comparison with the enormous volume of writing that was produced on the invasion and subsequent colonization of Ethiopia or on involvement in the Spanish Civil War, the number of books and articles that appeared on Germany in the wake of the Nazi assumption of power was circumscribed. Nevertheless, the dramatic adoption of an authoritarian system of rule, Hitler's admiration for the Duce and the Nazi plagiarism of Fascist symbols and rhetoric were all subjects that attracted a high level of interest in the national press and inspired a series of early commentaries on Germany under its new ruler.¹ As the foreign policy pursued by the regime broadened the divide that separated Italy from the democratic powers, and notwithstanding the crisis in 1934 over Austria, closer to Germany, another series of accounts appeared. Unlike the writing in the immediate aftermath of the Nazi triumph, which had included a fair amount of criticism, the writing that accompanied the rapprochement of the two dictatorships in the latter part of the 1930s sought to provide its readership with a positive evaluation of Germany under Nazism. As a formal alliance between the two anti-democratic powers was sealed with the creation in October 1936 of the Rome-Berlin Axis and cemented with Mussolini's visit to Germany in 1937 and Hitler's return journey to Italy in May 1938, writing which represented the Third Reich to an Italian public celebrated the two regimes' commonality of purpose.

The literature that appeared on Germany in the 1930s was the work of an array of different authors and assumed an extensive variety of forms. The Berlin correspondents for the national dailies provided the bulk of the written assessment of Nazism, but their work was supplemented by the commentary of more renowned journalists who came to observe one

aspect or another of the German state, as circumstance demanded. In addition to the steady stream of reporting, a number of established writers and critics were prepared, over the course of the decade, to offer their views on the potential or real development of Hitlerism. Most of these figures were only too willingly to parade their credentials as the authoritative voices of Fascism and to offer a picture of Nazi Germany that accorded with the aims of a foreign policy increasingly orientated towards support for Hitler.² Their work was either published in the pages of a respected newspaper or journal or else it took a form that approximated more to a standard kind of travel literature, where the author, on the move from one locality to another, compiled a diary of impressions. Yet, the task of defining the character of Hitler's Germany fell not only to journalists and writers of the first and second rank, it was also entrusted to men like Alessandro Pavolini, who was to exercise a position of considerable power (see below) on the eve of the Second World War. Though rapprochement entailed the suppression of discordant views, there were attempts, notably in the Catholic press, to draw a picture of life in Germany in an alternative perspective.

One might argue that the writings on Germany which appeared from early 1933 to the outbreak of the war reveal a story that is already well-known and which has been amply documented both by established and by recent historiography.³ But the interest of the views of those writers, journalists and critics who wrote on Hitler's Reich is not so much the story it tells but the indication that it provides on the reception of the ideology and social practices of Nazism. Reception is rarely simple, but in the case of Italian travellers to Germany in the 1930s the complexity of the process was compounded. The outward similarities between Nazism and Fascism may have encouraged some observers to convey unqualified praise of Hitler, but for more subtle commentators the perception of alterations to the Italian model of authoritarian government gave rise to feelings of unease. For these writers and journalists the expression of a sense of affinity with what they saw was tempered by an awareness of competing ideas on race and nationality. Yet any statement of diversity became increasingly difficult as Italy drew diplomatically and economically closer to Germany. Nowhere was this more apparent than on the subject of Nazi anti-Semitism. As witnesses of the Nazification of Germany, Italian commentators were confronted with a climate of steadily increasing persecution: some visitors to the newly constituted Reich were prepared to express their distaste for what they saw, but as rapprochement gathered momentum, a change of emphasis occurred. Onlookers were more and more willing to turn a blind eye to racist excesses or to raise only weak or facile objections. The change in

what was seen and not seen, in what was commented on and what was ignored, was not only symptomatic of the rapidly changing context in which characterizations of the new Germany appeared, it was also indicative of the psychological and ideological concerns of individual writers.

The consideration of collective behaviour in the new Germany seldom took the form of dispassionate contemplation and was more often worked into the description of a writer's personal appraisal of the pull exerted by Nazism. Thus, the writing on Germany gives us both a strong indication of the image of the Third Reich that was fed to the Italian public in the mid to late 1930s and a sense of the kind of mind that created that impression. In organizing their thoughts and in comparing what they saw with what they already knew, Italian journalists and writers recorded their sense of the mystique of leadership, their feeling for aesthetics and their insight into the guiding principles of Nazism. Perhaps most interestingly of all, when witnessing mass demonstrations of loyalty to the swastika, they conveyed the extent to which they were caught up in the reality that they observed. While well-known reporters for the democratic press like Dorothy Thompson (1932) or William Shirer (1941) maintained a sharp distinction between their habitual sense of themselves and what they saw as the appalling subservience to ritualized power, Italian correspondents in the late 1930s were more likely to reflect uncritically the intended manipulation of the state-sponsored exhibition or mass rally, holding some intellectual faculties in abeyance while allowing the imagination to be seduced by the aesthetics of the display before them. What follows isolates and examines three significant moments of the textual commentary on Nazi Germany: the writings that appeared immediately after the seizure of power; the books published as *rapprochement* was in full swing and the reporting that accompanied Mussolini's state visit to the Third Reich in October 1937. The intention is to examine the rapidity of the evolution of a picture of Germany within officially sanctioned publications, to point to instances of opposition and to look at the impact of exposure to the philosophy and practices of Nazism on the correspondents' record of their own subjectivity.

Early perceptions of Nazi Germany

The nomination of Hitler as Chancellor on 30 January 1933 was met, broadly speaking, with the approval of the Italian press. For both the *Corriere della Sera* (1933a; 1933c) and *Il Popolo d'Italia* (1933a) the success of 'authoritarian democracy' in Germany was proof of the

expanding appeal of Fascism as a political doctrine and evidence of the profundity of the Italian example. While one powerful European nation was adjusting 'its time to the hour of Rome', it was claimed that the political system of the established democracies was in disarray. *Il Popolo d'Italia* went so far as to prophesize that the twentieth century would be the century of Fascism and that the principles of the French Revolution that had supported democratic/Masonic societies from the middle of the nineteenth century to the outbreak of the First World War would at last be swept away (L.C. 1933). Following on from appreciations of Hitler as a charismatic leader who embodied the aspirations of the nation or declarations of a 'correspondence of sentiments, ideas and programmes' (*Corriere della Sera* 1933c) between Fascist Italy and the new power in Germany came a series of reports, all of which expressed admiration for the swiftness with which the Nazis had set about dealing with their political adversaries (*Corriere della Sera* 1933b; Ridomi 1933b) and for the impact of authoritarian rule on the cultural climate of the capital. For the *Corriere's* Cristiano Ridomi, the enforced closure of many popular cafés and bars had immediately changed the nocturnal character of the town, transforming Berlin into 'one of the most moral cities of the world' (1933a: 3). Similarly, F.B. (1933) of *Il Popolo d'Italia* admired the effectiveness of the action taken immediately after the seizure of power to combat pornography and applauded the drive to rid the capital of what he referred to as 'entertainments of foreign origin'.⁴

Supporting the predominantly positive assessment of the success of Nazism in the national press were a number of publications written either by journalists working in Germany or by figures who, possessing some knowledge about or connection with the country, had sought to find out more about National Socialism and its relationship with Fascism. Typical of this type of literary production was Pietro Solari's *Hitler e il Terzo Reich* (1932b). Solari had worked for a number of years in Germany for the *Corriere*, he had written a book length description of life in Berlin in the years before the collapse of democratic government (1932a) and he was to cover Nazism through the whole of its development. Yet, despite the extent of his journalistic experience, his text contained very little comment on his part: he portrayed the increasing dominance of politics by the NSDAP, the National Socialist German Workers Party, as unstoppable and abstained completely from judgement on the more sinister proposals of the party. He was happy for his text to function as a vehicle through which the views of leading Nazis could be relayed to an Italian audience. Thus Göring was quoted on the reasons behind the anti-Semitism of the NSDAP and its proposal to discriminate against weaker members of society (44–45); Goebbels' views on the party's relationship

with the working classes were reproduced (70–71) and Schacht was quoted on the injustice of reparations and the intention of immediately suspending payments (86–93). Solari simply reproduced the Nazi programme of 25 points and recorded, as they were expressed to him on two separate occasions, Hitler's views on France, on Freemasonry and on the conflict with the Catholic Church. He communicated, finally, Hitler's admiration of Mussolini and his contention that no obstacle stood between closer relations between Italy and Germany.

It would, however, be wrong to suggest that the superficiality of the correspondence of figures like Solari or Ridomi offered the whole story of the early perception of Hitlerism by Italian observers. More complex and probing investigations into the phenomenon of Nazism did appear and it is worth looking at the works, published in the early 1930s, by three well established writers – Franco Ciarlantini, Francesco Saverio Giovannucci and Rodolfo Bottacchiari – all of whom professed to be committed supporters of Mussolini and yet all of whom were prepared to make trenchant criticisms of the philosophical and cultural basis of Nazism. By the time he published *Hitler e il fascismo* [Hitler and Fascism] (1933) Ciarlantini was one of the most productive propagandists of the regime. Not only had he proved successful in disseminating the idea of Mussolini as the embodiment of the charismatic leader, he had set up his own journal, *Augustea*, and found his vocation in travelling from one part of the world to another looking for evidence of Italian cultural hegemony (see Chapter One). Before being drawn to Fascism, Bottacchiari had written for nationalist journals and had been an advocate of Italian intervention against the central powers in the First World War. He pursued a successful and prolific career as a scholar of German literature, writing on Romanticism and on what he regarded as the strain of irrationalism that pervaded the whole of German culture.⁵ Giovannucci was a less prominent figure than either Bottacchiari or Ciarlantini but by the 1930s he had published on Renaissance history as well as current affairs and, in addition to his work on the early manifestation of Nazism, he wrote on the importance for Italy of the Austrian question (Giovannucci 1934).

The texts on Germany published by these writers were each animated by a definite purpose. The premise of Ciarlantini's study was that Italian imperialism was not only territorial, military or commercial but also spiritual and moral (1933: 10–11), and his book set out to examine the repercussions of the theory and practice of Fascism beyond the confines of the Italian nation.⁶ Giovannucci's *La Germania di Hitler e l'Italia* [Hitler's Germany and Italy] (1933) was written as a reaction against the proliferation of articles and books which, in the author's view, naively

insisted that Nazism was simply the translation of Fascist principles into a different national context (1933: vi). In the early section of the text, the author peremptorily defined travel writing as the art of seeing behind the public face and observing manifestations of political change in their most intimate reality. The first five chapters of Bottacchiari's *Vecchia e nuova Germania* [Old and New Germany] (1935) had originally been published in 1919 and offered a detailed study of German literary and cultural history from Luther to the nineteenth century. The added chapters on the Weimar Republic and the Third Reich were devoted mainly to looking at the work of the theorists of Nazism and analyzing their claim to offer a synthesis of philosophical, scientific and metaphysical ideas long established in a German tradition of thought. The work was to fall foul of the authorities and copies were sequestered (Zagari 1971).

The picture of Hitlerism varied from one text to another with each author prepared to see positive elements in National Socialism. For Ciarlantini, Nazism shared Fascism's hostility towards parliamentary democracy, its opposition to an American model of unbridled capitalism and its belief that the role of women was in the home (1933: 31–32), with the NSDAP voicing the same kind of demographic concerns that Mussolini had articulated in his Ascension Day Speech of 1927. Bottacchiari acknowledged Germany's right to attain world power status and pointed a finger of recrimination against the Treaty of Versailles and against the democratic powers for attempting to hinder the expansion of newer nations (1935: 20–21). Yet, with varying degrees of intensity, all these interpretations of the new Germany saw Hitlerism as a danger and focused on aspects of its political philosophy that had no analogue in Fascist doctrine. The Nazi 'dogma of race' was isolated as indicative of the ideological distance that separated Italy from Germany. Ciarlantini pointed to the NSDAP's intended crusade against those not regarded as pure Germans and claimed that Mussolini had never sought to expatriate citizens of supposedly foreign origin or taken any anti-Semitic measures (1933: 58).⁷ Bottacchiari and Giovannucci both went further in pointing to actual instances of persecution against Jews and examined in some detail the intellectual underpinnings of the Nazi blood myth. Bottacchiari quoted Johann von Leers' polemical attacks on Cardinal Faulhaber (1935: 295–96) and examined the ideas behind Hans Günther's works of social anthropology. His description of Günther's concept of the Nordic as the ideal racial type focussed on the claim made in his works that the major achievements of European civilization from the works of Homer to the paintings of the Italian Renaissance were all the result of the creative inclinations of 'men of Nordic blood' (1935: 297). Following on from his ironic portrayal of Günther's appropriation of selective elements of Greek

and Italian culture, he looked at Arthur Moeller Van Den Bruck's *Das Dritte Reich* (1923) and at the notion it advanced of the Reich as the 'spiritual empire of the world' (1935: 304).

The proponent of National Socialist ideology who attracted the most attention was, however, Alfred Rosenberg. His *Mythus des XX Jahrhunderts* (1930) was seen by Bottacchiari, together with Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, as one of the two bibles of the new Germany and by Giovannucci as both dangerous and offensive (1933: 24).⁸ But it was the essential anti-Christian thesis of Rosenberg that the two Italian commentators were keen to impress upon their reader. Bottacchiari gave a detailed account of Rosenberg's exclusion of a notion of transcendence and his assertion that the divine resided immanently and was to be felt through the individual's consciousness of race. He then considered the contention of the *Mythus* that the 'race myth' was the motor of history and that the German people, who had supposedly seen their myth buried under those imported by the Jews and the Romans, were now struggling to free themselves from the influence of inferior races and to cultivate their inherent virtues of loyalty, action, heroism and honour (1935: 289–94). Bottacchiari sought to reveal the depth of Rosenberg's contempt for the Catholic Church and his belief that Christianity represented merely a declining episode in Germany's spiritual history. He interpreted the infatuation with racism as a manifestation of neo-paganism that was at the heart of the spiritual orientation of the new Germany (1935: 289). Similarly for Giovannucci, attempts to revive the cult of the god Wotan and other expressions of Nazi mysticism were both 'hysterical and pathological' (1933: 55). In his view, the depiction of history in the *Mythus* as the struggle between the glorious Nordic spirit and the corrupting influence of other races implied a hierarchy in which the Latin race was different and inferior to the German people (24, 65). On the subject of Nazi anti-Semitism, he cited the deplorable effect of Rosenberg's trip to London in May 1933 as evidence that the racism of the Nazi movement was evident to everyone (32–33).

Both Bottacchiari and Giovannucci positioned themselves as convinced supporters of Mussolini rather than as committed Christians, but their interpretation of National Socialism was close to that which, from the mid-1930s, appeared in the Catholic press in Italy. Drawing on the testimony of friends and contacts living in Germany (1936: vii), Mario Bendiscioli's study of religion under the Third Reich gave a detailed account of the tension between the Nazi state and the country's various Christian denominations. Though less trenchant in its critique of the writing of major Nazi ideologues than Bottacchiari, he explored with greater thoroughness the impact of National Socialist doctrine on the

institutional fabric of Germany. He saw the origin of the conflict between the Church and the Nazi state in the anti-Semitic campaign of the latter and he exposed the mounting tide of persecution, citing the content of Julius Streicher's illustrated newspaper *Der Stürmer* and referring to examples of Jews being excluded from public life (1936: 42–45). In his view the elevation of race to a fundamental principle of worship motivated an unprecedented assault on centuries-old cultural and juridical traditions as well as on the very notion of Christian consciousness. His analysis of the Nazi regime's educational policy, its drive to recruit the young into its associations and its attempt to alter the country's legal framework all supported his contention that its totalitarian project was to supplant Christian teaching with the 'religion of race'.⁹ As well as pointing to the climate of intimidation, Bendiscioli also related examples of resistance to the state's strategy of undermining the administrative apparatus of both the Catholic and Protestant Churches.¹⁰ The depth of knowledge of German institutions that was brought to bear, together with the evidence of testimonial accounts from those directly affected by the lurch towards authoritarianism, made Bendiscioli's text the most comprehensive picture of life in the early years of the Third Reich to appear in Italian. But the text was above all an indication of Catholic awareness of Nazi attitudes and policy towards Christian worship in Germany, a concern that was to be expressed most clearly in the papal encyclical, *Mit Brennender Sorge* 'On the Condition of the Church in Germany' issued by Pope Pius XI on 14 March 1937.¹¹

The purpose of Bottacchiari's exposition of the Nazi world-view was not only to display the racism at its core, but also to show that the 'new Germanic faith', like the Reformation before it, derived its energy from the ferocity with which it stood in opposition to Rome – understood not simply as the seat of Catholicism but also as a defining presence in European culture over centuries. By positing Nazism as the latest manifestation in a long-standing tradition of anti-Roman sentiment, he implied a corresponding history of Rome in which Mussolini, the 'most clear-sighted statesman' of his age (1935: 20), upheld both the spirit of the Roman Empire and the ethical/philosophical teachings of the Catholic Church.¹² Bottacchiari's apocalyptic, yet in many ways prescient, conclusion was that the recurrence of the pan-Germanic challenge to the spiritual authority of Rome coupled with the inevitability of Germany's assertion of its great power status would lead, in a short space of time, to a new European war and that the war, as Nazi pamphlets were already beginning to proclaim, would be 'a war of extermination' (1935: 325–26).¹³ Similarly, Giovannucci sought to warn his reader against the temptation of seeing Nazism as a displaced form of Fascism

or Hitler as an Austrian version of Mussolini. The intention behind his book and its author's desire to understand, through a long period of residence in Germany, the deepest workings of the country's 'soul' (1933: 60) was to promote greater reserve towards Hitler's Reich because of its racism, its revisionism, its inevitable expansionism and its probable territorial claims against Italy. Whether as a rhetorical strategy or as a sincere profession of faith, the work ended with an injunction to Italians to beware of the dangers of the future and to place their trust in the judgement of the Duce (83).

Appraisals of Nazi Germany in the late 1930s

If one moves forward in time to look at the writing on Germany that appeared in the late 1930s – after the invasion of Ethiopia and the imposition of sanctions by the League of Nations – one finds the proliferation of a particular kind of travel writing where the controlling hand of the regime was much more in evidence. Most leading newspapers published reports from different areas of Germany as their respective correspondents travelled from one part of the country to another to chart what were increasingly seen as the impressive changes wrought by Nazism. For the *Corriere della Sera*, Ridomi reported from a series of important sites in early 1937, while Solari, between 1938 and 1939, undertook a journey that took him from Hitler's birthplace of Braunau am Inn (1938b) through Leipzig (1938c) to Nuremberg and Berlin (1938d).¹⁴ Under the rubric, 'Viaggio nel Terzo Reich' [Journey through the Third Reich], Giuseppe Lombrassa of *Il Popolo d'Italia* travelled through Germany in 1937. In addition to the many accounts in the national press, several narrations of journeys across Hitler's Germany were also published in book form by writers of some standing. In 1936 Edizioni Apuane printed *Il momento della Germania* [The Moment of Germany] by the popular travel writer, A.M. Zecca.¹⁵ Despite its resounding title, the book was really the collected impressions of Catholic Germany in the declining years of the Weimar Republic, but an appreciation of the first years of Nazi rule had been carefully grafted onto the original text. In 1937 Arnaldo Frateili, an established figure in Roman literary circles and a good friend of Bottai and Pirandello, published under the title of *La Germania in camicia bruna* [Germany in the Brown Shirt], a lengthy description of a tour of towns and cities where the impact of Nazism was at its most visible.¹⁶ Alberto Bacile's *Orizzonti della Germania* [German Horizons] was published in 1938 and, like Frateili's work, it set out to provide a comprehensive account of Hitler's Reich.

All of the many representations of the new Germany were subject to a series of constraints. The ambivalence towards Nazism that leading figures in the Fascist hierarchy had felt and which allowed the publication of slighting characterizations of its ideology had, by the late 1930s, been replaced by a more obdurate attitude. All the editors of Italian newspapers were subject to the 'note di servizio' (directives) that emanated from what was to become the Ministry of Popular Culture (see Introduction). In the chapter of his history of the *Corriere della Sera* dedicated to the 'myth of Nazism', Glauco Licata (1976: 288–95) describes how Aldo Valori conveyed Mussolini's indications on Germany to the newspaper's editor, Aldo Borelli, and how the correspondents in Berlin angled their copy accordingly.¹⁷ Following the successful conclusion of the invasion of Ethiopia and the beginning of the Civil War in Spain, Licata argues that there was little cause for friction since the *Corriere* was willing simply to echo the Nazis' own version of their actions and not only to maintain its silence over examples of violence against Jewish people but to pursue an anti-Semitic campaign of its own in conformity with Mussolini's assimilation of the racial doctrine of National Socialism (1976: 292). The books by Frateili and Bacile were commissioned by publishing houses in order to present a picture of Germany in a certain perspective. Yet, many observers were prepared to lend their support to the policy of rapprochement without having to tailor their writing to limitations imposed from above. Most claimed that the wealth of experience on which they could draw placed them in an ideal position to assess the translation of the Nazi *Weltanschauung* into reality. Both Bacile (1938: 108–9) and Frateili (1937: 28–33, 103–4) referred to earlier journeys that allowed them to make informed contrasts between the democratic Germany of the recent past and the authoritarianism of the present.¹⁸ Frateili maintained that he had followed closely Hitler's accession to power and that his decision to cross the border once more in September 1936 was motivated by the desire to see the Third Reich with the 'eyes of a Fascist' (33).

The strategy of the writer declaring both the extent of his knowledge and his reliability as a witness was no doubt intended to persuade the reader of the factual nature of what was really a highly tendentious interpretation of Germany under the sway of Nazism. Despite their repeated protestations of autonomy, the journalists and writers of the time saw only the surface of Hitler's Reich. The itinerary that each of them followed tended to lead to the same places, while the space available for the record of conversations with ordinary Germans was extremely limited. The occasional comment in the writing of Italian journalists indicated some of the pressures acting upon the various correspondents

as well as the underlying purpose of many of the delineations of Germany. Two very different pieces of writing in the *Corriere della Sera* exemplify the point. In May 1937 Luigi Barzini Jnr. was among a group of journalists invited to see Hitler's mountain retreat above Berchtesgaden. The narration of his visit followed, more or less, the conventions of a report on the private residence of an important figure where the perception of the organization of the place is used as a means of gaining an insight into the mind of its owner. Both in his description of the Berghof (1937a) and of a nearby school (1937b), Barzini pointed to the fact that he, together with the select group of journalists with whom he toured, was being directed and encouraged to notice the symbolism of the surroundings. His writing duly reproduced a version of the Nazi Arcadia as it was suggested by the décor and location of the Berghof and by the pastoral pursuits of the girls at the local school. Yet, while bowing to the constraints imposed upon him, Barzini did maintain a level of resistance by inserting a series of ironic reflections into his reporting – noting that despite the evidence of Hitler's veneration for Frederick II, the eighteenth-century ruler was hardly a precursor of the 'simple, blonde nation' dreamed of by the Führer – and by implying that the carefully staged sights that he saw represented a refuge from, rather than an answer to, the complexities of the modern world. In another article that appeared barely a month before Barzini's two pieces, Ridomi (1937d) betrayed some information on the intentions behind the publication of Frateili's book on Germany. Recounting a train journey made recently in the company of the latter, he wrote of *La Germania in camicia bruna* offering an accurate account of the 'mutual understanding' between Italians and Germans that had been renewed by Hitler and Mussolini, and of the book's assessment of the changes brought about by four years of Nazi rule being destined to be read by 'vast swathes of the Italian public'. In his appreciation of the work, Ridomi had stated its purpose.

The correspondence from Germany in the late 1930s chronicled the success of National Socialism in infiltrating and exploiting the institutional structures of the modern state: the mild irony of Barzini's comments was very much the exception rather than the rule. Together with the appreciation of Nazi projects of social engineering went an admiration for the evidence of large-scale industrial reconstruction – interpreted either as evidence of military might or the renewed potential for national assertiveness. One correspondent after another visited such places as the Krupp steel works in Essen, the factories of I.G. Farben on the outskirts of Frankfurt, the Zeiss optical works in Jena or the plant at Siemensstadt. Bacile's narration of his visit to Essen, couched in the

language of the sublime, was typical in its appreciation of industry's potential to define society. He described a journey to the source of Germany's economic and military power and to a city that had become a factory:

Krupp è una selva di metallo e di cemento armato; è una città, è una regione intera ... Essen esiste in quanto esiste Krupp. Essen si è fatta grande perché Krupp è diventata gigantesca ... L'immensità e la enormità di ciò che vedete vi stupisce, vi stordisce, vi annienta addirittura. Vorreste ordinare, catalogare le impressioni, e ve le trovate infine tutte in confusione, tutte affollate nella vostra mente esterrefatta. (Bacile 1938: 189)

[The Krupp works are a forest of metal and reinforced concrete; they are a city, an entire region ... Essen exists in so far as Krupp exists. It has become big because Krupp has become gigantic ... The immensity and the enormity of what you see, astound, stun, and even overwhelm you. You would like to order or catalogue your impressions, but you find that there are all confused, all crowded in your astonished mind.]

In Bacile's writing a sense of awe is foregrounded by the insistence on the rarity of the place – the properties of heavy industry enveloping at the same time as imitating those of the town or the region – and on its magnitude. The combined sense of reverence and intimidation is conveyed through the author's feeling of his own insignificance as he beholds a spectacle of such immensity. At one point in his travelogue, he declared that 'everything in Germany is romantic' (1938: 267) and much of the book was written in the same key as the description of Essen. His visit to the Ruhr was described as a journey to the 'Kingdom of coal and steel' (1938: 175–95), his excursion to Friedrichshafen as the 'City of the airship' (155–58), while Hamburg was defined as the 'Metropolitan port of today' (147). For Bacile and for other commentators, a sensitivity to the aesthetics of the industrial world was supported by a wealth of photographs, mostly supplied by German authorities, of steel works, shipyards, building sites and newly constructed motorways.

The presentation through photography of evidence of technological progress that could be doubted only with difficulty recalled the propaganda that masked the stuttering colonization of Ethiopia. Yet the true significance of writing on places like Essen or Siemenstadt and the reproduction of photographs of grandiose industrial scenes beyond the Alps did not lie in its tendency to fetishize the landscape of the modern world but rather in its admiration for the spectacular results that could be obtained by an efficiently marshalled workforce. In every piece of writing on Germany that appeared in Italy in the late 1930s the attention of the observer was drawn to the collectivization and institutionalization of the elites and the masses or, more precisely, to the structures for imposing social uniformity put in place by the regime. The strength of

Nazism lay in its success in enlisting the active support of both the working classes and the young. For Frateili, seeing newly built housing for workers in Leipzig as evidence of the improvement of the lives of working people in Germany, the transformation of the state under Hitler had been made possible by convincing workers that their own well-being and that of the nation were inseparable (1937: 69–76). The indoctrination of the young, intended to reinforce the foundations of Nazism, was shown through appreciations of the Hitler Youth (Frateili 1937: 77–89; Bacile 1938: 108–14) and through descriptions of various schools throughout Germany. Ridomi visited the Colonial School for Women in Rendsburg (1937c) and the Order Castle (*Ordensburg*) in Vogelsang, designed for the exclusive education of future Nazi leaders (1937b). The focus of such accounts was on the disappearance of any sense of individuality behind the creation of highly specific ideal type. The reception of eugenic thinking was evident in the ease with which the journalists were prepared to make a link between the processes of selection employed by the schools or academies they visited and the apparent racial perfection exemplified by their students. Ridomi, associating health with race, wrote of the women he saw in Rendsburg: ‘they represent the ideal wife for the colonist: they are women of his blood, his race, they are strong, extremely healthy and prepared for the rigours of what may be a hard life ... they are perfect examples of femininity’ (1937c: 8).

To a readership used to laudatory descriptions of the apparatus of the state, the gallery of spaces that were described in Germany may well have seemed strange but they were also, at some level, familiar.¹⁹ While the writings of Bottacchiari and Giovannucci had set out to warn of the dangers of seeing Hitler’s Germany as a reflection of Fascist Italy, none of the correspondents of the late 1930s were willing to heed that warning, and in writing about the regimentation of life in the Third Reich they often drew upon their experiences in witnessing the ‘reclamation’ of the Italian nation through the social policies and public works schemes that had been introduced since 1922.²⁰ Thus Frateili, as he moved through the heartlands of the party and the state, referred to the Italian analogue of each of the collectivizing enterprises that he saw: he compared the institute of ‘Kraft durch Freude’ with a kind of Dopolavoro (state-controlled leisure organizations) and drew a series of analogies between the Hitler Jugend and the Gioventù Italiana del Littorio (1937: 101–3).²¹ What impressed him most was the Nazi emphasis on sporting prowess. Arguing that the purpose of both Fascism and National Socialism was to improve the ‘quality of the race’ and to provide for the military preparation of young people (103), he saw the country’s sporting infrastructure as a concrete

indication of what the state could deliver. Both he and Bacile wrote of sport as a cult, a theatrical display and as the summation of a nation's authority: the memory of the Berlin Olympics of 1936 and the propagandistic purpose that it had served loomed large in their writing.

Alive to the value of institutions or events as a means of conveying an ideological meaning and as writers with a clear sense of their own profession, it is not surprising that both sought to understand the workings of Goebbels' Ministry for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda in its central organization as well as in its daily operation across numerous spheres of cultural activity. In order to gain a clearer sense of *Gleichschaltung* (the coordination of the arts and media of communication), Frateili paid a visit to the office of the *Reichskulturkammer* (Reich Chamber of Culture) at the Headquarters of the Propaganda Ministry in Wilhelmstrasse while Bacile, in a chapter devoted to the theatre under the rule of the Führer (91–103), looked for evidence of government directives in the programmes of the Schauspielhaus and the Deutsches Opernhaus. Both expressed their awareness of the importance of cinema as a vehicle for shaping mass perceptions and both travelled to the studios of the UFA at Neubabelsburg. Both texts suggested that the secret of power lay in dissemination. As well as exploring the mechanics of theatrical and film production, both authors described visits to major exhibitions sponsored by the state.

In one of the most revealing chapters of his *Orizzonti della Germania*, 'Mostre berlinesi' [Exhibitions in Berlin] (1938: 57–62), Bacile wrote in detail of his visit to 'The German People and Work' and 'The Miracle of Life', both held at the Kaiserdamm.²² Wandering from one cavernous room to another, at times almost overwhelmed by the quantity or the eeriness of the exhibits on display, he reproduced the Third Reich's representation of itself as the product of centuries of German history, its deployment of the biological sciences in its cult of race and its vision of the future for its people. Comparing the visual display of history on offer in Berlin with the Exhibition of the Fascist Revolution held in 1932 (see Chapter Three), Bacile expressed surprise at how little space was dedicated to the First World War: in Rome 'the silent shouts of the martyred generation' (58) had been the fulcrum of the whole experience and the spectator had, he claimed, been intensely involved in the drama and the apotheosis of the War's dead. His response to some of the more brutal assertions of both Nazi exhibitions was not entirely uncritical. He described the section of 'The German People and Work' reserved for an exposition of racial theory as 'a combination of a museum of pre-historical exhibits and an anthropologist's study' (60) and was, when going through 'The Miracle of Life', prepared to challenge the Nazi

insistence that the mentally ill should be denied the right to reproduce. But moments of stated disapproval were rare and by not refuting the interpretation of history or race that was paraded in the Kaiserdamm, his writing served merely to relay some of the core beliefs of Nazism to a wider public, and read on occasions like a catalogue of Nazi slogans. He was not slow to express his admiration for the ability of Hitlerism to transform the raw material of the crowd into an active agent of change and he articulated (60–62) with great clarity the purpose of the exhibition culture of the regime in giving ordinary Germans a sense of their origins, their evolution and their future.

The narration of a visit to one or other of the major exhibitions of 1930s Germany, as well as the means of disseminating Nazi thinking on a range of important issues, also gives an indication of how Italian observers tended to see the reality of the Third Reich. Rather than investigating the function of the places to which they were taken or attempting to investigate the nature of their impressions, they tended to see the institutional and industrial structure of the country in terms of a display, where the visitor to a college, factory or sporting venue saw what was staged for his consumption. The judgement that was subsequently formed was necessarily therefore of a state working efficiently with the consensus of its people. The collaboration or intervention of Goebbels's Ministry of Public Enlightenment in this perception of Germany was suggested not only by the similarity of the locations that were visited but also by the reproduction of the same photographs. The description of the harmonious working of the state that featured in the writing was supplemented and reinforced by pictures of the results of public works schemes or of crowds expressing their enthusiasm for the regime.²³ If Goebbels had travelled to Italy in 1934 to admire the translation of ideology into architecture and the notion of the nation state into an ideal of social discipline (see Chapter Three), then there is a certain reciprocity between the record of his impressions (1936) and the writings of Italian commentators on the Third Reich. The extent to which this writing played a part in linking Fascism with Nazism by disseminating a positive image of the latter can also be gauged by a contrast with reports on life in Hitler's Germany that appeared in Britain, France or the United States. Where Dorothy Thompson (1932) or Romain Rolland saw evidence of persecution or oppression,²⁴ the attention of Italian observers was directed at the aesthetics of the totalitarian project. To the extent that they represented Nazism as it saw itself, the works by Bacile and Frateili showed the reach of the German propaganda machine.

The elision between Nazi orthodoxy and its observation was particularly evident in the reception of anti-Semitism. Any sense of criticism contained in the writing of both Bacile and Frateili was largely obscured by a

readiness to accept the racial doctrine on which Nazism was predicated. For Frateili 'reclamation' was a process that involved the promotion of a narrowly conceived version of German culture but also the exclusion or suppression of everything that lay beyond the boundaries of such a definition. The anti-Semitism of his text lay in its repetition of the association made by Nazism between Germany's Jewish community and everything that supposedly hindered the project of national reassertion. One of the chapters of his book, 'Sigfrido contro Giuda' (1937: 231–41), was structured as a dialogue between the author and a German friend on the position of Jews in Germany. Though the dialogue began with Frateili pointing to the evidence of mounting persecution in every area of life and on differences between Nazism and Fascism on the subject, most of the chapter was simply a rehearsal of Nazi prejudice: Jews were accused of profiting from the post-war economic crisis, undermining the institutions of the state, promulgating anti-German ideology and denigrating the idea of the Nation. Elsewhere, his commentary on the implementation of Nazi social and cultural policy made no secret of the marginalization of Jewish people in most professions. His discussion of the regimentation of artistic creation under Hitler equated the supposedly decadent and defeatist intellectual atmosphere of the Weimar Republic with what he considered (reporting the prevailing attitude) the excessive influence of Jewish writers, critics and theatre directors (1937: 129–31, 138–41). The same assertion was made by Bacile, who claimed that the act of gaining control over theatrical production in Germany entailed purging Jews at every level (1938: 93).

The description of the Nazi philosophy of collective belonging with its cult of race, its militarism and its worship of the leader was often accompanied by a delineation of Nazism's own idea of its antithesis. The memory of the atmosphere of the Weimar Republic was used as a negative caricature of democratic freedom and as the symbol of the decadence from which Hitler had allegedly retrieved the nation, but it was the perceived danger of Communism that received greater coverage. Lurid accounts of the destructive potential of Bolshevism featured regularly in the Italian press in the years of the Spanish Civil War (see Chapter Five), but what distinguished the reporting of the Nazi portrayal of 'red barbarism' was the way in which it colluded with the interpretation of Communism as the expression of an essentially Jewish world-view. Frateili's narration of his journey through Germany ended with a solemn account of his visit to the Deutsches Museum in Munich to see the Anti-Bolshevik exhibition (1937: 241–50). Reporting the visit, as he was inclined to do in the rest of the book, he made no distinction between the simplifications of the stage show and the complexities of reality: what he

saw represented in the rooms of the exhibition was for him an accurate reflection of the forces that determined world politics outside. In contrast to the ordered, healthy living space of the Third Reich there was the anti-world of Communism spreading disorder and terror across every continent. Such a world – represented graphically through photographs of screaming crowds, mass destruction and human misery – had its nerve centre in Moscow and was led by Jews.²⁵ The repetition of a connection between the spread of Communism and a Jewish conspiracy of global dimensions legitimated, in Frateili's view, both the internal repression and anti-Semitism of Nazism. It was because of the danger represented by 'the enemy at the gates' that Germany 'imprisons its Communists in concentration camps, isolates Jews, abolishes criticism and pursues the Bolshevik spirit even into the realms of art and culture' (1937: 249).

Mussolini's state visit to Germany

Covering the Nuremberg rally of September 1934, William Shirer speculated in his diary on the reasons behind Hitler's astounding success in winning the support of the masses. In his view, the Nazis' restoration of 'pageantry, colour and mysticism' to the 'drab lives of twentieth-century Germans' played an all-important role. The beginning of the rally in the Luitpold Hall on the outskirts of Nuremberg was, for him, not merely 'a gorgeous show' with its brightly coloured flags and its inspiring music but a gathering that possessed 'something of the mysticism and religious fervour of an Easter or Christmas Mass in a great Gothic cathedral' (1941: 24). Two years later, recording the official celebration of the reoccupation of the Rhineland, he was keen to reiterate what in his opinion was evident to anyone who observed Nazism first hand but which was poorly understood abroad, namely, the facility with which Nazi ritual imitated the imposing atmosphere of Wagnerian opera (1941: 54). His interpretation of the proselytizing dynamic of Nazi ritual – those who participated in the party festival had their faith renewed and returned home to preach the Word with even greater vigour – was shared by Dorothy Thompson, who stressed the influence of Mussolini on Nazi theatricality (1932). By 1937 Shirer expressed more frequently his sense of nausea at the repeated spectacle of mass adulation (1941: 63), his sense of weariness at the idea of covering yet another party rally and at witnessing the slavish and hysterical fanaticism in the eyes of the faithful (1941: 83).

For those Italian correspondents who witnessed the growth and consolidation of Nazism, the phenomenon of mass adherence was not

described as a deviation from the ordinary conscious practices of the individual, let alone as something that was by turns disconcerting or sinister. It may be tempting to dismiss their observations as simply propaganda, but the interest of their writing increases if it is considered in the light of some of the basic theoretical insights of Adorno on the communicative strategies of fascism. For Adorno, fascist propaganda aims to win supporters not by producing rational or objective arguments but by playing upon the unconscious psychological mechanisms of its audience.²⁶ The degree to which it succeeds in manipulating its public is, therefore, most clearly understood if the concepts of psychoanalysis are brought to bear on the mode of address that it deploys and on its interplay with the mental and emotive processes of its intended recipient. In his essays on the appeal and the dynamics of authoritarianism, Adorno thus relies upon a Freudian model of the self to investigate the elements of identification and narcissism that define the leader/follower relationship and the libidinal bond that links the individual to the mass. If the coverage of the Nazi acclamation of the Duce during his state visit of 1937 is examined in the light of Adorno's reading of Freud's work on group psychology and the conscious/unconscious motivations of the self, then one gains an insight into that coverage that is principally twofold. Firstly, it becomes only too clear how the writer seeks to draw the reader into the world he describes by suggesting powerful sensations of elation and belonging. Secondly, the writing reveals itself as a record of the author's own susceptibility to the claims that are made upon him by the masculinist rhetoric of the mass rally.

Though the yearly gatherings at Nuremberg, the Berlin Olympics and the recurrent military parades through the centre of Berlin were all reported, it was Mussolini's visit to Germany from 25 to 29 September 1937 that, for obvious reasons, attracted the most sustained attention of the Italian press. The first meeting between Hitler and Mussolini had taken place in Venice as early as 1934, but the growing closeness of Italy and Germany was reflected in the number of official visits between the two countries in the latter part of the decade.²⁷ In January 1937 Göring had been welcomed by the leading figures of the regime and in the course of his stay in Italy he had been shown Naples and Guidonia – one of the new towns south of Rome and a base of the Italian Air Force. While in Rome he was taken to the Foro Mussolini where 30,000 young Blackshirts gave him an enthusiastic welcome.²⁸ In May, as Mussolini and Ciano received Neurath, a delegation of Italian industrialists was introduced to Hitler. In the early summer Blomberg was the guest of the Duce in Rome,²⁹ but the climactic event in this calendar of reciprocal visits was that of Mussolini. According to De Felice (1996: 414–18), it was the

Germans who were most keen for this visit (in recognition of the earlier meeting in Venice) to occur and the invitation had initially been extended by Göring during his stay in Italy. Acceptance was only conveyed to Blomberg in June, by which time the course of the Spanish Civil War had placed a further obstacle in the way of any thawing of relations between London and Rome. De Felice argued that the journey, as originally conceived by Mussolini and Ciano, was to be 'demonstrative' in character insofar as it was intended to impress upon both Britain and France the dangers of closer unity between the Axis powers. In the event, most commentators are agreed that the journey exercised a profound psychological impression on the Duce, who returned to Rome with a sense not only of the awesome military might of the Reich but also of the grip of the Führer over his own people.³⁰ On the German side, the spectacular nature of the welcome that had been reserved for Mussolini evidently paid dividend: Hitler, as Kershaw writes (2000: 44–45), was overjoyed that the visit had served its purpose in cementing Italo-German friendship and that an important part of his foreign policy had fallen neatly into place.

Photographs of the dictators in each other's company, visiting some of the hallowed sites of the Nazi cult or addressing the crowds that followed their movements, are among the defining images of the twentieth century: they appear to mark the sealing of a 'brutal friendship' (Deakin 1962) and the moment when the fate of the two regimes was forever linked. The visit to Germany – the moment when the two revolutions, the two nations and the two leaders came face-to-face – certainly assumed an enormous significance in the media of the time. The blanket coverage of the event indicated a desire on the part of the regime not only for the Italian public to share in the exultation that was heaped upon the Duce but also to gain the same vision of Germany as their leader. In addition to the regular correspondents who wrote on Germany for their respective newspapers, the big guns of Italian journalism were rolled out for the occasion. *Il Popolo d'Italia* called upon Mario Appelius to reach the appropriate pitch of excitement; in addition to Virginio Gayda and Mario Franchetti, Ferdinando Chiarelli wrote for *Il Giornale d'Italia*; the *Corriere della Sera* relied upon Orio Vergani, Cesco Tomaselli and, most interestingly of all, Alessandro Pavolini. It was as a journalist that Pavolini rose to prominence in the 1930s: he had relayed Ciano's exploits as a pilot in the invasion of Ethiopia (see Chapter Four) and, before becoming Minister for Popular Culture in October 1939, he wrote on South America and on the Balkans for the *Corriere*.³¹ Considering the importance of the ministerial post he later occupied, it is true to say that the copy he produced on Germany displayed a sophisticated awareness of the way in which public opinion could be successfully manipulated. It was the job of both regular

and special correspondents to draw out the symbolic significance of every stage of the journey, to convey the atmosphere that prevailed in the various locations that were visited, and to report on the changing moods of the crowds gathered to catch a glimpse of the Duce. It was their task to create the impression of one triumphant performance leading to another and to build up a sense of expectation as the state visit worked towards its climax with the arrival of Mussolini in Berlin and the address of both dictators to a vast gathering of supporters in the Olympic stadium.

Even before Mussolini set foot in Germany, the sense of anticipation within the Reich and the epochal significance of the forthcoming journey were being amply communicated. For Solari the visit presented the Duce with the opportunity to see for himself the 'face of the new Germany' (1937), while for Giuseppe Piazza of *La Stampa* it would lay the foundation stone for a future Europe and command world attention (1937a). More dramatically still, the visit was seen as evidence of the sturdiness of the resolve of the Rome-Berlin Axis in the face of the minatory power of Bolshevism: reports of preparations for the visit appeared next to dispatches from the front in Aragon or the Asturias and amidst fierce denunciations of Communism.³² The Nuremberg rally, at the beginning of September, received more extensive coverage than it had done in previous years. The emphasis in most correspondence from the event was on the warmth of the welcome reserved for the Italian delegation and on the common opposition of both dictatorships to the spread of Communism. The anti-Bolshevik exhibition, which had moved from the Deutsches Museum in Munich to Nuremberg to coincide with the opening of the rally, now contained a section dedicated to the Italian contribution to the struggle against Moscow (Franchini 1937). As the description of the climate of expectation intensified so the intended meaning of each stage of the Duce's journey became clearer: the visit would begin in Munich [Figure 6.1] where Mussolini would be greeted by the party in the place of its origin; watching manoeuvres in the Mecklenburg sound, he would be saluted by the German military; in Berlin it would be the turn of the state and people to fete the foreign leader (see Piazza 1937c). In Italy, the beginning of Mussolini's visit was marked with appropriate pomp and ceremony. Before boarding the train that would take him northwards, he opened the exhibition in the Palazzo delle Esposizioni on the Rome of Augustus, inviting every newspaper to make a comparison between the earlier ruler and himself. While a select band of reporters enjoyed the privilege of travelling on the same train from Rome to Munich, it was the task of others to cover the preparations for the arrival in the Bavarian capital.³³



Figure 6.1. Mussolini and Hitler in Munich, September 1937. Reprinted with the permission of the Alinari Archives, Florence.

Of all the reports of the day in Munich, Pavolini's was the most sensitive to its suggested meanings (1937a: 1). In describing the preparation of the scene that would greet the Duce, he drew attention to the relation of the elaborate street decorations and the totalitarian nature of the worldview that they signified. The display was, for him, the visual expression of the will of the Führer and it was evoked in terms of order, discipline, repetition and conformity:

Qui tutto obbedisce ... a un unico concetto architettonico, senza una stonatura e una dispersione. E, ecco, ne consegue, per i metodi autoritari, una costruttiva vittoria estetica ... In questa musica di tinte ... i fregi ricorrono insistenti come leitmotiv: littorio, svastica, triplice folgore stilizzata dello squadristo nazista ... si riconosce la passione di Hitler per la decorazione, per l'architettura e per l'arredamento.

[Here everything obeys ... one architectonic principle, without a single diversion or false note. And, as a result of the authoritarian will, there follows a brilliant aesthetic victory ... In this music of different shades of colour ... the decorative emblems of the Lictor, the swastika and the stylized thunderbolt of Nazi squadristism recur insistently like a leitmotiv ... one recognizes Hitler's passion for architecture, decoration and design.]

After having reviewed the scenography, he wrote (1937b) on the military parade through the heart of the city.³⁴ His awareness of the appeal of the spectacle was expressed more through perception and sensation than through conceptual thought: he conveyed the impression of his senses being overawed by the dominating presence of a collective ideal of discipline, an ideal that was felt through the rhythm of the soldiers marching and the organized but exultant behaviour of the crowd. For him the militaristic display of the disciplined male body was not only an experience of quasi-mystical proportions but also a triumphal contact with the new Germany.³⁵ The worship of a belligerent notion of masculinity, at times crude while at others sublimated, was evident not only in the parade that greeted Mussolini but in the organization of every stage of his tour.³⁶

Following his arrival in Munich, the Duce was taken to see the manoeuvres of the navy in the Baltic sea and on the following day he was taken on a tour of the factories in Essen. He then travelled on to Berlin and the climax of his visit – the mass rally on the evening of the 28 September. Hundreds of thousands gathered in and around the stadium to hear the speeches of the two dictators, while thousands more lined the streets along which Hitler and Mussolini would pass.³⁷ Waiting for the rally to begin, covering the mood of the crowd, noting the aesthetic dimensions of the scene and listening to the singing of Nazi songs and of 'Giovinezza' ['Youth'] were Appelius, Pavolini and the correspondents of all the major Italian newspapers. The spectacle depended on the crowd's



Figure 6.2. Mussolini addressing the crowds at the mass rally in Berlin, September 1937. Reprinted with the permission of the Alinari Archives, Florence.

rising sense of anticipation and this was conveyed meticulously as each reporter sought to magnify the significance of the event by reflecting on the personal sensations that he experienced. The most eloquent description of the rather crude Wagnerian symbolism of the occasion was provided by Ferdinando Chiarelli (1937): the darkness in which the crowd waited represented the state of decline in which the two nations had risked being submerged before their respective saviours emerged from the depths of their own peoples with their message of redemption; the solemn ringing of the Olympic bell and the flooding of the stadium with hundreds of shafts of light accompanied the apparition of the two leaders, while symbolizing the spirit of renovation that they were supposed to personify; the speeches of the Führer and the Duce celebrated a communion of ideals and pointed to the destiny of Germany and Italy. The speech that Mussolini delivered in German to the assembled masses [Figure 6.2] claimed that the vision of Fascism and Nazism shared many common elements: the belief in the power of the will; the veneration of youth and of hard work; love of one's country and contempt for the easy life. The speech contained the prediction that the Europe of tomorrow would, in the logical course of events, belong to Fascism.

In descriptions of the yearly gatherings of the NSDAP at Nuremberg, journalists writing for the Italian press had, from a distance, expressed qualified admiration. Frateili had portrayed the event as a celebration of the renewed liberty and dignity of the German people (1937: 40–41). For Lombrassa, of *Il Popolo d'Italia*, the parades were an external demonstration of the social levelling of Nazism: the expression of unity through the military obliteration of cultural and social differences (1937).³⁸ What is interesting about the rally in Berlin on 28 September is that the Italian journalists who covered the event positioned themselves not as spectators but as participants. Reading their notations against observations made in Freud's well-known essay on group psychology (1985) and Adorno's application of Freudian theory to the analysis of right-wing propaganda, some deep-seated mechanisms of individual and collective allegiance are brought sharply into focus. Freud's essay lays particular emphasis on the alteration to the mental activity of the individual that is provoked by the influence of the crowd, on the extraordinary intensification of his or her susceptibility to strong emotional experience and on the consequent lowering in intellectual activity as he or she merges into the group (Freud 1985: 104).³⁹ When witnessing imposing processions in Benares and Madurai in the 1920s (see Chapter Two), Appelius had expressed a strong sense of aversion for the mass adulation of the effigies of Hindu deities and for what he

interpreted as the frenzied behaviour of the multitude of worshippers. The record of his impressions had depended upon a dichotomy between the experiences of observer and observed: between the apparent sanity of the Western onlooker and the insanity of the participants in the religious rites. In his writing and in that of others on the rally in Berlin, by contrast, the gradual but sustained agitation of the crowd was conveyed *through* the representation of the writer's growing feeling of belonging to the throngs of the Nazi faithful.

One correspondent after another wrote of a sensation of being overwhelmed by the dimensions of the crowd, of being in 'a searing lake of people' (Vergani 1937b), or within a 'tumultuous movement of the multitude' (Baroni 1937). For Chiarelli (1937), in the midst of this gigantic display, the scene had been entirely taken over by the waiting masses while a sense of the world outside had rapidly seemed to evaporate. As evening approached, Appelius wrote of the dreamlike appreciation of being in the 'mystic penombra of a cathedral' or within 'a fantastic basilica' (1937). Pavolini (1937b) described how the groups of Berliners, with whom he had been waiting for the rally to begin, lost any specific characteristics and became one with their surroundings. Every description of the fluctuations of the crowd contained within it a suggestion of a slackening of the writer's own sense of individuality and of his awareness of a changing perception of reality. Appelius (1937: 2) described hearing, in the shouts and songs of the gathering, 'the ancestral voice of the race', while Chiarelli (1937: 3) sensed the closeness of something 'sacred and heroic'. The paralysis of the critical faculty of consciousness that Freud sees as essential for full participation in the group is evident in the repetition in every article of phrases expressive of awe and wonder. Underlying these repeated utterances, and itself indicative of an intensified liability of the group to powerful emotion, is an elementary structure of desire, of impatience preceding the fulfilment of expectation.

The theoretical ideas outlined by Freud do not apply randomly to any formation but exclusively to a group dominated by a leader, and the essay is as much an enquiry into the functioning of the mysterious power of the figure of the leader as it is an analysis of the sentiments that are likely to predominate in the crowd. The major criticism that Freud makes of the findings of Le Bon is that they do not address the libinal organization of groups (1985: 109). The transformation of the individual, as he or she participates in the moods and actions of the crowd, should not, he argues, be understood only in terms of susceptibility to externally generated sensations or by the simple proximity of a multitude of other human beings. Instead, he maintains that a more complex psychological process

occurs, the workings of which become clearer if an analogy is made between the way in which the object of desire in any form of erotic attachment acts upon the subject and the way in which the figure of the leader exercises a fascination over his followers. In Freud's essay, the emphasis of the description of the state of 'being in love' is on the processes that promote the idealization of the love object and the consequences that this kind of idealization entails for the functioning of the ego. It is Freud's contention that the overvaluation of the characteristics of the loved object – that is so noticeable a feature of erotic involvement – indicates that a large part of the narcissistic libido of the subject has been directed towards the object. He argues that: 'the ego becomes more and more unassuming and modest, and the object more and more sublime and precious, until at last it gets possession of the entire self-love of the ego, whose self-sacrifice thus follows as a natural consequence' (143). The power exerted by the love object is thus understood in terms of its invasion and alteration of the structures on which the subject's notion of its own selfhood is based. In impeding any critical reflection on itself and in requiring the unquestioning devotion of the ego, the loved object, according to the essay's well-known formulation, 'has been put in the place of the ego ideal' (144).

While acknowledging that elements not present in his model of being in love – such as the feeling of paralysis that the presence of someone of superior power may provoke (146) – are at play in the elevation of the leader, Freud nevertheless sees a strong current of libidinal activity in the behaviour of the individual towards the latter. Prey to the altered state of consciousness that is induced by a feeling of belonging to the crowd, the individual – whose sense of independence has been rapidly or progressively weakened – is willing to assume the group ideal embodied by the leader in place of the mental agency that normally governs his or her behaviour and which is ordinarily responsible for 'testing the reality of things' (145). As well as seeing the group's emotional tie with the leader as analogous to the kind of alteration within the normal working of the mind that is provoked by erotic attachment, Freud also makes a comparison between hypnotic suggestion and the coercive power of the leader. If, as he writes (148–49), the transference of authority that occurs through hypnotism involves the re-animation of the individual's earliest emotional tie that had made him or her compliant towards parental authority, then the mysterious dominance that the leader exercises over the group in part resides in the ability to re-activate an earlier stage of psychological development in his followers: in the figure of the leader a magnified image of the father is unconsciously perceived. But the power of the leader depends also upon the approximation of the individuals

within the group, and Freud argues that it is by putting the same object in place of the ego ideal that followers within a group identify with one another. Dominated by the same ego ideal that is personified by the leader, each member of the group shares a conscious sense of self that is, to an uncanny degree, similar. Perception of belonging to the group is heightened by the sense of having the same self.

Returning to the writing on the mass rally in Berlin, we find that the exaltation of the leader is conveyed through an appeal to the authority of the past: the Duce and the Führer are the modern incarnation of the *condottiero* or the Roman Caesar and the celebration of their meeting is defined time and again as the apotheosis not only of the men themselves but of the idea that they represent (Baroni 1937; Vergani 1937a). The notion of apotheosis appears not merely as a figure of speech, for every account is centred on the climactic moment when, within the ‘epic poem’ (Vergani 1937b) or ‘the pagan spectacle’ (Chiarelli 1937), the awesome figure of the dictator appears. In Pavolini’s prose the apparition of the deified leader is presented in the following terms:

Quale è stato il momento in cui non ci è più riuscito di distrarci, e ci siamo messi a fissare con un’ansia acuta la soglia di un’ora che resterà culminante nella nostra vita individuale e nella vita di una generazione e di un continente? Tra poco romberanno le campane lassù e al limite di questa moltitudine straniera e fraterna in cui sono immerso, il Capo nostro mi apparirà, insieme al loro, come su un orizzonte d’oceano, il punto di un faro. (1937c: 2)

[What was the moment in which we could no longer be distracted, and when we began to stare with acute anticipation at the beginning of an hour that will remain climactic in our individual life and in the life of a generation and of a continent? In a while the bells will ring out up there and above this foreign but fraternal multitude in which I am immersed, our leader will appear to me, together with theirs, as on the horizon of the ocean, like the point of a lighthouse.]

In the writing of Chiarelli, Mussolini seemed to derive his strength from the vastness of the gathering:

Dominava su quell’immensità acclamante e tempestosa come un timoniere sui flutti ... la sua figura non c’è immensità di folla che possa sminuirla. Essa, al contrario, è proprio da queste enormi moltiplicazioni di vita che riceve potenza. (1937: 3)

[He dominated the cheering multitude as a helmsman dominates the waves ... no immense gathering can diminish his stature. It is from these immense multiplications of life that, by contrast, his figure, receives its power.]

The sublimation of the leader is here taken to an extreme, but what is also evident in these descriptions is the transformation of the writing self into an unquestioning disciple. The expression of exaltation is also one of compliance, for accompanying the panegyric of the two leaders is the

characterization of the writer as submissive, as entirely willing to defer authority and to identify his own wishes with those of the crowd. In Freud's explanation of the mystique of leadership, the follower – by identifying the figure of the leader with one of the most important constituents of the self – transfers all his or her self-love on to the leader and, as a consequence, experiences a feeling of devotion and of humility not as an imposition but as a pleasure. In the narration of the rally in Berlin, the sensation of pleasure is brought to the level of ecstasy by the peculiar nature of the surroundings, which effectively preclude any engagement with the world beyond the spectacle, and by the awareness of participating in the same mental and emotive processes of hundreds of thousands of other spectators, all of whom unconsciously witness the elevation of themselves through the mass adulation of the leader. Writing on the frenzied performance of the Führer at Nuremberg in September 1934, Shirer insisted on the easily perceptible yet deeply unsettling changes to the throngs of assembled supporters, of the 'shedding of their individual souls and minds', of their 'personal responsibilities, doubts and problems' to merge completely and ecstatically into the 'Germanic herd' (1941: 27). Those journalists charged with relaying the Berlin rally to the Italian public did not so much record the changing atmosphere of the crowd of Nazi supporters as celebrate themselves the release of personal autonomy. In the wake of the rally, all Italian newspapers were saturated with correspondence offering personal testimony of the sanctification of the alliance between Hitler and Mussolini.

Notes

1. On the inspiration Hitler drew from Italian Fascism, see Kershaw (1999: 180–81).
2. McGregor Knox argues that close alignment with Germany was a goal that Mussolini sought to achieve from early 1936 in order to encourage a radical change in the European balance of power that would be favourable to Italy. In his view (2000: 142–43) the victory in Ethiopia gave him the authority to pursue the policy.
3. Recently published works that explore Fascist Italy's relationship with Nazi Germany include Knox (2000), see note 2; Richard Bosworth's biography of the Duce (2002), in particular pp. 264–87, 334–82; and the study by Carlo Gentile, Lutz Klinkhammer and Steffen Prauser (2003) of photographic representations of the two Axis powers.
4. Many Italian visitors to Berlin in the 1920s had expressed their shock at the sexual freedom evident in Weimar Germany. See, for example, Angioletti's reflections of his travels contained in *L'Europa d'Oggi* (1934: 1–75).
5. For an account of the life and literary career of Bottacchiari, see Zagari (1971).
6. Though written as the record of an extended lecture, given to the Philological Circle in Milan on 22 January 1933, the book contained many impressions of life

- in Germany gained through visits to the country made in both a private and an official capacity.
7. He pointed to the antagonistic attitude of leading Nazis towards Christianity, contending that such aggression placed the success of the movement in danger. The force of this critique was, however, diminished by the assertion that Hitler did not share the same dogmatic racism of many of his followers (1933: 48–54).
 8. Bottacchiari went on to define Rosenberg's text as 'a vast cauldron' full of all the 'worst that German culture' had produced (1935: 294).
 9. In particular the final three chapters of his work, 'Cattolicismo e nazismo' [Catholicism and Nazism], 'Educazione e scuola in regime Nazista' [Education and Schools in Nazi Germany] and 'Antiromanesimo giuridico e anti-romanesimo religioso' [Legal and Religious Anti-Romanism].
 10. His work documents the resistance of German Bishops to attempts to undermine Catholic cultural associations, and he provides a good deal of information on the Church's opposition to Rosenberg's writing (1936: 190, 222–25).
 11. The text accused the Nazi government of violating the Concordat of 1933 between the Third Reich and the Holy See.
 12. The description of the Duce as defender of the Faith was echoed by Bendiscioli who, in the preface to his work, quoted Mussolini to the effect that an assault against religion was 'a struggle against the ineffable and the intangible' (1936: vi).
 13. Bottacchiari (1935: 305) drew on Hans Bäcker's prediction in *Deutschland und das Abendland* (1935) of the conflict between Rome and Germany.
 14. Solari started his string of articles with a piece entitled 'Journey through Germany' (1938a). His travels in the country continued through the winter and into the beginning of 1939 with excursions to the Ruhr, Frankfurt and Potsdam. Several other itineraries through Germany were pursued in the wake of Mussolini's official visit. Immediately after the event, for example, Aldo Pasetti wrote a series of pieces for *Il Popolo d'Italia* under the rubric, 'Germania in camicia bruna' [Germany in a Brown Shirt].
 15. Zecca's earlier book on Russia, as the preface to *Il momento della Germania* informed the reader, had sold 10,000 copies. In the text on Germany, no mention is made of the tension between the Catholic Church and the Nazis.
 16. Zoppi Garampi's account of Frateili's life (1998) makes much of his activities in the cultural sphere in the 1920s: with Giuseppe Bottai, he co-founded *Lo spettatore italiano* in 1924 and from 1927 he was responsible for the cultural section of *La Tribuna*. The biographical description unfortunately glides over his writings on Germany and Poland (1938) on the eve of the Second World War.
 17. Aldo Borelli was editor of the *Corriere* from 1929 to 1943. Licata documents how, with Hitler's accession to power, the *Corriere* was given preferential treatment over other Italian newspapers in so far as news stories were passed to it first (Licata 1976: 291–92). He also refers to the close surveillance exercised by the German secret police.
 18. Describing a visit to Berlin in 1930, Frateili wrote of having seen bars reserved for 'the inverted' and of having visited a 'new Sodom where everything was permitted' (1937: 103).
 19. The writing bears an obvious similarity to the articles dedicated to evoking the sacred spaces of the Italian nation (Chapter Three) and to the description of those

institutes set up to prepare potential emigrants to Italy's new colonies (Chapter Four).

20. The titles of the chapters in Frateili's work, 'La bonifica del divertimento' [The reclamation of leisure] or 'Gli intellettuali nello stato' [The intellectuals in the state], make this clear and lend a further significance to his claim that he had wanted to see Germany with the eyes of a Fascist.
21. For an examination of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy in comparative perspective, see Brooker (1991) and Bessel (1996).
22. Bacile documents that the exhibition of the 'German People and Work' covered 185,000 square metres.
23. The photographs that were reproduced in the texts by Frateili and Bacile were all intended to testify to the success of Nazi collectivization: they included examples of the new architecture of the Third Reich; pictures of Hitler accepting the acclamation of the crowd; the sacred sites of the state and the party.
24. See the letter sent by Rolland to the *Kölnische Zeitung*, 14 May 1933, referred to in Snyder (1976: 298).
25. For Frateili the evil of Communism was epitomized by Republican atrocities in the Spanish Civil War. He was prepared to accept that 98% (1937: 245) of the Communist leaders were Jews and that France was following the same path as Republican Spain.
26. Adorno conflates German and Italian Fascism, but his object of study is the writing of anti-Semitic agitators on the west coast of the U.S.A. In his words, the very material of this type of propaganda 'evinces a psychological approach' (1994: 162).
27. An account of the first meeting of the two dictators is provided by Bosworth 2002: 280–81.
28. According to Ridomi (1937a), Göring's trip to Italy is a sign that everyone should consider the Rome-Berlin Axis as a reality of European politics.
29. A more extensive list of the exchange of official visits is given in Gentile, Klinkhammer and Prauser (2003: 57). Italian officials who travelled to Germany included the Minister for Corporations, Tullio Cianetti, the Minister for Propaganda, Dino Alfieri, and the head of *La Gioventù Fascista*, Renato Ricci. Gentile et al. note that officials were, on occasion, taken to Dachau to see the effectiveness of the repression of dissent.
30. See Bosworth (2002: 329); De Felice (1996: 414); Gentile, Klinkhammer (2003: 57); Knox (2000).
31. For an account of Pavolini's career as a journalist in the late 1930s, see Petacco (1998: 73–85).
32. Reporting Hitler's address to the Nuremberg rally of 1937, Piazza gave a description of the Russian state as representing not the liberation of the proletariat but its enslavement by the tyrannical force of exploitative Judaism (Piazza 1937b).
33. Appelius was among those who travelled with the Duce. Solari and Vergani were in Munich on the eve of Mussolini's visit. Filippo Bojano, according to Shirer (1941) no friend of the Nazis, was also in Munich to cover the arrival of Mussolini for *Il Popolo d'Italia*.
34. The parade involved 36,000 men including regular army and motorized brigades of the SA and SS. Pavolini (1937b: 3) expressed particular interest in seeing

- Hitler's original collaborators, defining Streicher as 'the extremely popular exponent of the anti-Semitic struggle'.
35. Admiring the symbology of the SS, he wrote: 'the ultimate exaltation of a political discipline, of an ideal devotion taken to the level of military mysticism' (1937a).
 36. On the worship of the male body in the public rhetoric of fascism, see Mosse (1985).
 37. Estimates vary on the number of people assembled in the stadium on 28 September to hear the speeches of the two dictators. Vergani (1937c) and Gayda (1937), quoting Goebbels, wrote of there being three million people in and around the stadium. Bosworth puts the figure of those present at 800,000 (2002:329) while Gentile et al. (2003: 57) estimate the figure at around one million.
 38. This description of unity included an assertion of anti-Semitism. For Lombrassa (1937) the expulsion of Jews from the collectivity was a necessary part of the struggle towards unity.
 39. Freud is working here from the principal conclusions made in Le Bon's *La Psychologie des Foules* (1895). On the influence exerted by the work of Le Bon on Mussolini, see Gentile 1996: 476–80.

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Chapter 7

Competing Models of Humanity:

Perceptions of Russia and the United States on the Eve of the Second World War

The literature that appeared in the interwar years on Russia and the United States was extensive. Along with every other Western country, Italy supplied a steady stream of writers and journalists who set out to discover the truth about the Soviet experiment. Though many Italians travelled to Russia in the 1920s, many others were drawn to witness the consolidation of the Soviet State and the effects of the first Five-Year Plan.¹ In the mid 1930s a number of lengthy texts on Stalin's Russia, all written by influential commentators, appeared. In 1933 Pietro Maria Bardi, known principally for his work as an art historian and critic, published the narration of his journey through Russia with the resounding title, *Un Fascista al paese dei Soviet* [A Fascist in the Country of the Soviets].² In the same year, Gaetano Ciocca produced one of the most authoritative assessments on Russian Communism to appear in Fascist Italy by describing his experiences as an engineer involved, with a team of experts from other European countries, in the construction of a ball bearing factory on the outskirts of Moscow.³ The following year, the writer and journalist, Carlo Scarfoglio, undertook a journey through Russia with the intention of discovering the reality of life under Stalin's rule.⁴ In 1935 Corrado Alvaro published the narration of a journey through Russia, *I maestri del diluvio* [The Masters of the Floodwaters], in an attempt to describe what he defined as a new way of being in the world. The book was to become his best-known non-fictional work and Marcello Flores (1985: xiv) has compared it, in terms of its sophistication of perception, with the writing of more celebrated American and French observers.⁵

Between 1930 and 1940, as Emilio Gentile has noted (1993: 7), no fewer than 51 books on America were published in Italy, a figure that contrasts with the ten texts that were published between 1922 and 1929 and the seven books that were printed between 1940 and 1943.⁶ In the mid to late 1930s America was visited by a disparate selection of travellers. In 1934 Franco Ciarlantini, who remained until his death in 1940 one of the most prolific travellers of the regime and who had written two earlier studies of America (1929; 1931), recorded a series of impressions with the leading title, *Roma–New York e ritorno. Tragedie dell'americanismo* [Rome–New York and Back Again. Tragedies of Americanism]. A year later, the 29-year-old writer, journalist and later influential film-maker, Mario Soldati, set out his vision of the States in the popular and often reprinted work, *America, primo amore*, [America First Love]. In 1936 the novelist and critic Giuseppe Antonio Borgese, who had moved to America in 1931, published a study of his adopted country, *Atlante Americano* [American Atlas], that concentrated, in the words of Luciano Parisi (1996: 334), on the habits and life style of Americans and the structural features of their civilization.⁷ The journalist, Beniamino de Ritis, who had lived in the States for some years, published his perception of America in 1937. In the same year Margherita Sarfatti published the lengthy travelogue, *L'America, ricerca della felicità* [America, Search of Happiness]. On the eve of the Second World War, Emilio Cecchi sought to give a panoramic appraisal of the United States, much of which was published in the *Corriere della Sera*.

The books mentioned above are only some of the most remarkable of a wide collection of texts, a collection that indicates the level of concern with the models of society offered by the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. in the Italy of the 1920s and 1930s. Whether they appeared in the guise of an unmediated reflection or of a more rhetorical polemic, whether they concentrated on personal anecdote or whether they sought to establish a firmer foundation for generalization, all these travelogues were essentially motivated by the desire to peer beyond the surface of reality and to see a model of modernity in operation.⁸ In many instances it was not so much the country that was the real object of interest but the processes that could be seen to be working through it. Despite the global crisis of capitalism of the early 1930s, American methods of production were seen as a potential model for emulation, while the vast scale of industrialization that was occurring in Stalin's Russia represented another vision of what the future might hold in store. Refracted through the everyday scenes, situations and people of conventional travel writing, the image of modernity that appeared was one that tended to produce extreme responses. While some observers could appreciate or even

admire elements of what they saw, most writing on Russia and America in the mid to late 1930s articulated a series of fears and anxieties.⁹ The general contention was that societies which had either reached an unequalled level of mechanical advancement or which were going through an enforced process of industrialization were societies that lived with many unwelcome consequences. The overt or insidious challenge to traditional societal structures, provoked by an altered relationship to production, was the major theme that linked writing on Roosevelt's America and Russia under Stalin. The decline or destruction of religious sentiment, the nature of relations between the individual and the state, the problematic persistence of institutions like marriage or the family were all aspects that, notwithstanding many restrictions, came under the scrutiny of Italian travellers. Above all, however, it was the concept of the human being underlying the Russian or American project of modernity that most inspired the curiosity of travellers like Alvaro, Scarfoglio or Sarfatti.

The aim of this Chapter – considering the vastness of the topic and the attention that has been devoted to the importance of the image of Russia and America in 1930s Italy – is relatively circumscribed, insofar as I wish to consider only a small selection of texts and to concentrate on the complexities surrounding their representation of Russians and Americans. The people who appeared in each travelogue were of varying social status, they revealed contrasting aspects of their societies and they interacted differently with their observer. Some of the most disturbing pictures of human life in Russia were of those people who had found themselves on the wrong side of successive phases of the Revolution. Recounting his wanderings through Moscow, Alvaro presented a gallery of the haunted faces of those now defined as ‘former people’ – those of wealthy bourgeois or noble origin – still clinging to some visual remnant of past Tsarist times (1943: 42–43).¹⁰ Gaetano Ciocca (1933: 196–97) remembered seeing, from a station platform near Moscow, a trainload of deported *kulak* families being returned, in indescribable squalor, from confinement in Siberia. Soldati's book on America has remained in print largely because of his portraits of ordinary Americans living through the privations of the Depression, while Margherita Sarfatti journeyed through the very highest levels of American society. But rather than focussing exclusively on the methods that Italian observers deployed to depict the various people they encountered, I want to explore how they attempted to reach an insight into the way in which individuals were moulded by different systems of economic production and by contrasting ideas on the role of the state. Acting as a touchstone in every inquiry of this kind was the writer's own understanding of the nature of humanity

and the economic/social conditions most suited to satisfying its needs and aspirations. The clash of competing models of humanity gives the writing on Russia and the United States its basic dynamism. In most cases the definition of an other concept of the human being – whether the *celavièk* [new man] of Communist ideology or the citizen of the world's most powerful democracy – inspired stark predictions of an anonymous or menacing future. But there were instances where distinct philosophies of human identity were not seen as incommensurate or indeed where the author's appreciation of what he or she saw implied a critique of Fascism.

Impressions of the U.S.S.R.

The most literary accounts of life in Stalin's Russia, and those on which I wish to concentrate, were by Corrado Alvaro and Carlo Scarfoglio. Both writers claimed that it was not their purpose to write a condemnation of Bolshevism but simply to discover the truth. Their journeys took place at a moment of relative calm: they travelled to Russia in the interlude between Stalin's war against the wealthy peasant class and the era of the Great Terror, supposedly set in motion by the murder of Kirov in 1934.¹¹ Indeed, there was a certain irony – considering what events were about to take place – in Alvaro's first impression of the inhabitants of Moscow as the survivors of a recent cataclysm (1943: 9–10).¹² Though neither writer set out to present a lurid picture of the atrocities that had occurred since the Revolution, they were both keen to exploit their considerable powers of expression to produce an impression of a country in one of the most dramatic phases of its evolution. Present on a tour of the Soviet Union organized by a British travel agent for sympathizers of Communism, Scarfoglio transformed what was intended to be a positive experience into a critique of itself. A flexibility of perspective and an awareness of sensory perception allowed Alvaro to construct a self-reflective and intriguing portrayal of Russia in the grip of the second Five-Year Plan. The premise of his travel writing, like that of his narrative fiction, was that the everyday details of ordinary people's lives contained within themselves strong indications of the underlying tendencies of a society. Thus, if the writer was prepared to record with sufficient patience even the apparently trivial aspects of what he or she saw, then some of the greater forces defining human destiny would simultaneously be revealed.¹³

The very structure of the tour that the two writers followed was designed to reveal the novelty and the success of the Soviet system of production. At every stage of the journey their respective guides,

provided by the state agency 'Inturist', explained the significance of the sites to which they were taken and the purpose that they served within the new economy; further detailed explanations were provided on industrial modernization, on labour productivity and on the mechanization of agriculture. With the purpose of proving the rapidity with which Russia was gaining on its Western neighbours, the visitors to the U.S.S.R. were taken to some of the country's most imposing factories. Scarfoglio made an extensive tour of the car plant at Nizhny-Novgorod, sold to the Russians by the Ford Motor Company and reputedly capable of producing in excess of 200 cars a day (1941: 139). Alvaro, alive to what he defined the festishization of the machine (1943: 29), was taken to a tractor factory in Stalingrad, employing 16,000 workers and a model of the new workplace, where huge pictures of Stalin and insistent commandments to the workforce adorned most walls. Both witnessed the apparently infinite landmass of the collective farms on the southern reaches of the Volga. When meeting a group of workers on his journey down the river (1941: 326), Scarfoglio expressed his appreciation for the Soviet practice of encouraging young people to dedicate themselves early on to a particular line of work. Alvaro admired the gigantic concerns on the Volga and the Don, while he was prepared to argue (1943: 199) that the material conditions of life in Russia had unarguably improved since the time of the Tsars.

The evidence of successful industrialization was not, however, taken at face value. The constrictions of the journey, the ubiquitous presence of the official guide, the sense of what could be viewed but what was strictly *off limits* made both travellers feel that they had entered a bizarre world where there were few means of probing an obvious but unacknowledged gap between appearance and reality. The metaphor that both writers used to convey the sensations that they experienced was that of watching a theatrical display. The sense that people were performing a role, adhering to a script, was evident in the wearying didacticism of their guides, the rehearsed speeches of the engineers and workers at the factories they toured.¹⁴ Both writers felt that they were being invited to visit a land of 'mirages' (Alvaro 1943: 66) but their point was not simply that itinerary that they were permitted to follow provided foreign observers with a tightly controlled image of Communism. They made the far more important claim that they witnessed a process in which the social spaces of the vast country – its town squares, its sites of production, its former churches – were being transformed into a stage on which the Bolshevik worldview was endlessly repeated. The work of modern Russian playwrights that Alvaro saw enacted in Moscow's theatres was, he contended, merely a means of propagating the same basic messages – the

corruption of capitalism, the need to increase production, the backwardness of religion – that were broadcast everywhere.¹⁵ Genuinely impressed by the system of public parks, with the leisure facilities they provided for Russian workers, he was nevertheless disconcerted by the crude intrusion of propaganda into these spaces.¹⁶ As he wandered down one avenue in the Park of Culture and Rest in Rostov, a gallery of huge wooden caricatures each exemplifying a form of behaviour either to be imitated or avoided, he felt as if he had involuntarily become the audience of a giant puppet show (1943: 75–76).

The essential surreality of visiting Russia in the 1930s was accentuated by the difficulty of establishing any kind of meaningful contact with ordinary Russians. In the words of Alvaro: ‘it was never possible to establish pure and simple human relationships’ (1943: 40).¹⁷ The two travellers gained the impression that the Russians with whom they spoke merely reiterated a series of slogans and they sensed a climate of suspicion underlying the whole performance. Speaking to workers, engineers or to fellow travellers in the presence of their guide, they felt that they were looking at people who were conscious of being watched. Involved in a drama where what was unseen was often more significant than that which could be observed, they felt that they stared uncomfortably at the people they met from the viewpoint of the NKVD (secret police). Rather than the characterization of individuals forming the substance of either travelogue, it was the reticence of people that became the major object of interest. The fear of being denounced for speaking openly to a Western journalist that both Italians felt they detected was in itself seen as indicative of a more widespread apprehension. Noting how workers in a factory rarely dared to speak to him alone, Alvaro described the fear of accusations of sabotage or counter revolutionary activity as a ‘repugnant sore’ (1943: 105) in Russian life. If the threat of irrationally directed violence could be sensed in moments of inter-personal contact, it became suddenly apparent on other occasions. Alvaro may have noted the transformation of the Moscow stage into a tool of propaganda but he was more unsettled by the extent to which the ‘horror of blood ... of prisons unexpectedly flung open ... of informers’ (63) was woven into the action of many plays and into the lesson that they aimed to impart. The perception of impending menace was compounded by references, mostly drawn from the work of other journalists, to the methods of the NKVD for dispatching its victims (Scarfoglio 1941: 298) or to the barely comprehensible scale of suffering caused by agricultural collectivization.¹⁸

Yet, the contention of both books was that the Soviet state did not only persecute those who resisted its drive towards modernization, the economic system itself was presented as one that preyed upon the

working classes. The argument that Scarfoglio elaborated was that the Russian state did not recognize the worker as a partner in the process of production since salaries were not related to industrial performance.¹⁹ Though industry was not in the hands of private ownership, the state acted like a capitalist in expecting its workers to adhere to a 'pitiless Taylorism', while not allowing them a share of any profit (1941: 137, 261–62, 371–72). He was not alone in suggesting that Russia was in the thrall of America.²⁰ The substance of Alvaro's critique of the Soviet economic example was that it seemed to promise the kind of prosperity that America experienced before the Depression but that such a promise was undermined by the low wages of Russian workers.²¹ Gaetano Ciocca's *Giudizio sul bolscevismo* [Judgement on Bolshevism], which enjoyed the official stamp of approval (Schnapp 2000: 37–38), articulated a similar though more detailed and more technically informed appreciation of Communism as state capitalism.²² Ciocca regarded the failings of the Five-Year Plan (1933: 40–49) to be due in large part to the slavish devotion to an American model of production. In his daily involvement in the planning and building of a factory he described a mismatch between an imported theory of industrial development and a reality in which everything, from communication to transport, was highly precarious. The situation that he portrayed was one in which 'uncertainty, imprecision and disconnection' (1933: 140) reigned supreme. Scenes of extreme squalor and poverty were represented in all accounts of the U.S.S.R. that were published in Italy during the 1930s. Such scenes were presented as the corollary of the poor economic performance of Soviet industry (Ciocca 1933: 153) and as the result of a regime where there wasn't so much as the 'shadow of socialism' (Alvaro 1943: 188–89).

The capacity of the Russian people to remain loyal to Communism remained a mystery at the heart of most texts. Though Scarfoglio did not have the means or the opportunity to gather first-hand information about the exercise of Bolshevik terror, he claimed to witness a type of rule that in time would flourish into 'the most brutal kind of imperialism' (1943: 149). Like all travellers to Russia, he was taken to a church converted into a museum of anti-religion. But rather than inspiring the sort of feelings that it was supposed to, the visit led him to ask how it was that the spirit of religious observance should have capitulated so easily in the face of the Communist onslaught or, in other words, how a religion that until relatively recently had exercised so commanding an influence over so immense a population could have left so little trace of itself (1941: 231–32).²³ The question led him to make a further reflection on modernity that was ahead of its time. He suggested that despite Bolshevism's assertion of rationality, its apparent faith in Darwinism and

its open war against what it regarded as religious superstition, it exercised a power over its adherents – and by extension over the population as a whole – by manipulating the legacy of the Orthodox Church. In the narrative of modern Russia that his book proposed, the imperatives of the Five-Year Plan had become the new Gospel, while he claimed to see evidence of a persisting belief in transcendentalism in the elevation of the Soviet state, in its intolerance of opposition and in its cult of the leader. His argument that the state had assumed the attributes of a deity was substantiated by his account of Lenin's mausoleum (1941: 247–52). For Scarfoglio the exposition of Lenin's corpse, the prominence of the sepulchral structure in which it was housed and the attitude of the visitors to the site all offered the Western observer an immediate visual experience of the transition of a sense of the divine from the person of the Tsar to the dead founder of Bolshevism. Official Soviet iconography [Figure 7.1] was, he implied, repeated in the ancient language of Orthodox worship.²⁴

Stronger than any interest in the continuance of the past or in the success or otherwise of enforced modernization was the inquiry into the kind of human being that the Soviet model of modernity was in the process of giving life to. Italian travellers to the U.S.S.R. may have prided themselves on their empiricism, they may have claimed that an understanding of the bigger picture was to be sought in the patient observation of minor details, but the tone of their warning of the dangers of the Soviet model could hardly have been more drastic. André Gide (1936), who had warmed to the welcome that he had received from the groups of Russian students and workers that he had met in the course of his travels, was nevertheless perturbed by what he saw as a climate of intellectual servility, by the apparent pervasiveness of the wish to toe the party line. While he was ready to articulate his fears, he quite clearly believed that it lay within the power of the Russian Revolution to correct some of the worrying tendencies that it had developed. Scarfoglio, by contrast, carried his critique of Communism as a brutal form of state capitalism into his prediction of the kind of humanity that would one day populate the Soviet Union. The allegation that his book repeated was that Communism, like capitalism, revolved around a 'purely economic conception of man' (1941: 126, 386). He asserted that the incredible injustices that he had witnessed, the super-agglomerations of humanity maintained barely above subsistence level, were all indications of human society that was conceived as a production line, where the individual was denuded of any autonomous economic power and rendered absolutely beholden to the state.



Figure 7.1. Photo of Moscow, 1935, from Topham Picturepoint. Reprinted with the permission of the Alinari Archives, Florence.

The theory underlying much of Scarfoglio's writing, namely that Bolshevism, instead of liberating the human subject had developed new forms of oppression, was also evident in his consideration of women's rights. Alvaro was prepared to acknowledge that Communism had enabled women to acquire some of the same rights as men and, regarding the workplace, he noted the number of women using precision tools in the factories that he visited as well as the groups of women employed in the construction of Moscow's underground (1943: 133–34). But Scarfoglio, rather than seeing groups of highly skilled female workers as an indication of progress, declared himself in favour of a more traditional division of labour (1941: 276). But the extent of the conservatism of his critique, of his adherence to Catholic doctrine and his implied support for the policies of Italian Fascism, at least concerning demography, were revealed fully when he addressed the institution of marriage and the structure of the family. While the British sympathizers of Communism with whom he travelled were keen to know more about the facility with which divorce could be obtained in the Soviet Union, he did not interpret this as evidence of the emancipation of women but as another indication of the state's inability to understand the spiritual dimension of human existence. His denunciation of what he saw as the devaluation of the foundation on which the family rested was compounded by the view he expressed on the availability of abortion in Russia (100–1). In place of established religion and the sanctimony of marriage, he saw the Soviet state as capable of providing only a 'mediocre materialism' (174–79, 192–94) and an example that was at odds with its intention to privilege the collective over the private. In one of his many evocations of the United States as a means of castigating Soviet Russia, he claimed that Bolshevism had, in the field of sexual relations, promoted an individualism that was unrestrained by a sense of social responsibility.²⁵

Alvaro was less pessimistic insofar as he claimed, in his meetings with ordinary Russian people, to observe the persistence of a basic faith in the family, though he described those who had lived through the first phases of the Revolution as the 'sacrificial generation' (1943: 134). But his work, and that of Ciocca, provided their reader with glimpses of a future that was as bleak as that which Scarfoglio predicted. Ciocca argued that in its pursuit of the Five-Year Plan, Communism had sacrificed everything on the altar of production and that it had relentlessly sought to mould human beings entirely to the material goals of the collective. Yet, its attempt to catalogue, predetermine and rationalize human activity according to the requirements of the economic system was predicated on an alarmingly simplistic notion of the human being that took no account of the individual's competing impulses towards selfishness or altruism

and allowed no consideration of any yearning towards spirituality (1933: 227–29). Thus, the struggle to lead the Russian people towards a new world would forever be impeded by a failure to understand the working of fundamental human attributes, a failing that could only be compensated for by the repression of any manifestation of opposition. All of the scenes of Soviet life that Ciocca represented in his ‘judgement on Bolshevism’ with their peculiar or terrifying dimensions were meant to indicate a system whose ultimate aim was to reduce human beings to the level of a machine or the status of an ‘automated puppet’ (227). The definition of the Communist experiment in the texts on Russia of the mid-1930s may not have used the same fanatical terminology as the writing that covered the Spanish Civil War (see Chapter Five) but they predicted nothing less than the end of humanity. Ciocca’s work did not pretend to be a simple factual account, it was shot through with literary allusions and evocations of Dantean circles of punishment, while Alvaro represented a sense of horror at the potential disappearance of man within the mechanics of modernity.²⁶ The conclusion to his work defined Communism as a mass movement that would ultimately overwhelm a Christian concept of individuality and, in its suppression of spiritual independence, transform the single human being into a ‘social product, a physiological and environmental consequence’ (1943: 204).

Impressions of the United States

Though there are some elements that Italian observers did appreciate about the Communist system, the overwhelming impression that they recorded was of a social experiment that was not leading to a better future for the country’s inhabitants. The relationship between Fascist Italy and the United States was more complex. Emilio Gentile (1993) has argued that, among the various groups who were strongly supportive of the regime, a strain of Americanism co-existed with the more predictable articulation of anti-American views and that the timing of expressions of opinion on the United States did not necessarily coincide with the state of diplomatic relations between the two countries.²⁷ In the 1930s, as he has documented (1993: 11–15), those opposed to the example of modern life exemplified by the U.S.A. reiterated the same stereotypes which had built up during the 1920s and which drew on a longer, and by no means exclusively Italian, tradition of anti-American sentiment. Those who saw Fascism as a reactionary revolution that promoted agrarian values, considered the States as Italy’s antithesis, while for a wider section of official opinion America represented the threat of an individualistic and

materialistic culture contrary to the collective values of Fascism.²⁸ Of particular concern to the regime as it embarked on its demographic campaign, as the work of Bruno Wanrooj has demonstrated (1985; 1986), were American examples of sexual freedom and comparatively lax moral attitudes. The fear that the import of American products would be harmful to the Italian way of life and the Fascist desire to remould aspects of the Italian national character was widespread. But competing with this range of anxieties was the more positive view of the United States, entertained by a number of leading figures, which was prepared to see the country as representing qualities – including enthusiasm, appreciation for innovation and belief in the cult of the nation – that had their equivalent in the attitudes that the regime sought to promote.²⁹

All texts that recounted journeys to the United States in the mid to late 1930s reflected this level of tension and ambiguity but among the most significant writings to do so were those by Franco Ciarlantini (1934) and Mario Soldati (1935). Despite its length, it was well over 300 pages long, Ciarlantini's book on the United States was not based on extensive journeys across the country or on the account of meetings with individual Americans. Instead, it proceeded largely through assertion, while its ideological motivation was clear at every turn. The author expressed his dismay at the power of the machine and by the apparently unregulated nature of American society; he offered a series of visions of a civilization where human beings lived in nightmarish urban environments, enslaved by the machines that they themselves had created. His repeated allegation was that in the United States fundamental European institutions – a surprisingly large number of pieces focused on marriage – had been both materialized and devalued. His hostility was most intense when he considered the consequences of the introduction of the Immigration Act in 1924: the law was interpreted as evidence of the xenophobia of the Anglo-Saxon population that, keen to maintain its numerical superiority, willingly oppressed all other ethnic groups. But the anti-Americanism that he expressed in so many of his narrated impressions was not unqualified and rather than constructing an image of the United States as the simple antithesis of Italy, he affirmed that the country could learn much from the Fascist example.³⁰ Reiterating the theory that underlay his writing on Africa and the Mediterranean (see Chapter One), he claimed that Fascism served an evangelical purpose on a global scale insofar as it displayed how principles drawn from an ancient civilization could serve as the model of modernity.³¹ It was his contention that Roosevelt had been inspired by Mussolini's dictatorship (1934: 7) and that, as an American equivalent of the Duce, he would be capable of bringing strong government to a society that demonstrated a high level of disorder.

Mario Soldati's account of his prolonged stay in America was quite different from that of the writing of Ciarlantini. He did not travel to America as a figure who performed a recognizable role within the culture of the time, but as a student of Columbia University who prolonged his stay by doing a number of odd jobs in New York. He sought to define the country that he saw by recounting his impressions of the Americans he encountered.³² But his text nevertheless followed a certain path. To begin with, he was entranced by the novelty of the country, by the advanced material environment and by the evident difference of American modes of social interaction from their European equivalent. He even went so far as to compare the sensations that he experienced with those of the first emigrants to the country (1985: 18, 31). More and more frequently, however, he encountered what he defined as a sense of public squalor and individual desolation, describing scenes which in his opinion indicated the extent of the Depression: in New York he depicted the particularly sinister appearance of a row of derelict shops and factories, while working in the Bowery he was appalled by the lack of any notion of social provision (105–111).³³ Though he was by no means an enthusiastic supporter of the regime, the views that found expression in his book, and which had been circulated in various journals beforehand, did counteract the idea that the States offered an example that societies in Europe should aim to emulate.³⁴ He represented himself as becoming progressively disillusioned with the 'new country' and especially with the Americans that he met while staying in cheap hotels on the East Coast or seeing the occasional show at the theatre or cinema. In the course of his travels, he began to develop a more general theory of American identity. Reflecting on the violence of Chicago and on the scenes of sexual passion enacted in American films of the period, he wrote:

[L'America] è monotona, arida, buia. Il secolare puritanismo ha considerato *quae vitam faciunt beatiorem* peccati. Ha represso, atrofizzato gli istinti che soli rendono sopportabile la vita: l'amore, la socievolezza, l'ozio, la gola. Intanto il diavolo, cacciato dal corpo, è rientrato per le vie dello spirito. (1985: 182)

[America is monotonous, arid and sinister. The Puritanism of the Americans has repressed and atrophied those instincts which make life worth living: love, conviviality, idleness, eating. The Devil, chased from the body, has re-entered the spirit.]

Yet, the two figures who most dramatically represented the conflict between Americanism and anti-Americanism on the eve of the Second World War were Margherita Sarfatti and Emilio Cecchi. Both writers, as earlier chapters have shown, had a fair amount in common. Both were established commentators on the visual arts and both were literary critics of considerable standing. As accomplished travellers who had embarked

on similar journeys within the Mediterranean and elsewhere, they shared a tendency to regard the highest forms of cultural production as the clearest reflection of the social forces within a given country. Both were resolutely internationalist in their outlook and in their intellectual interests.³⁵ But, as I have indicated before, they approached Fascism from different directions: Sarfatti, like Mussolini, from a Socialist past, Cecchi from a more conservative position and one that was initially hostile.³⁶ Their writings on the United States were both authoritative: Sarfatti had access to some of the most influential people, while Donald Heiney (1964: 35) has claimed that no one was better placed than Cecchi, so far as cultural preparation and experience were concerned, to write a comprehensive study of America in the late 1930s. Their writings showed an equal level of intellectual and rhetorical complexity and yet, in terms of the image of the United States that they conveyed and the views concerning the model of humanity that was exemplified by American culture, the two texts were poles apart.

Assuming the voice of the representative of Italian culture and interested in famous places and people, Sarfatti travelled from New York to California, to Philadelphia, Washington, Chicago and Salt Lake City, conversing with Lady Astor, exchanging ideas with the theatrical and industrial designer Norman Bel Geddes and, when in California, being taken on a private tour of the mansion of William Randolph Hearst.³⁷ Part of the interest of Sarfatti's text undoubtedly lies in her characterization of the great and the good of American society in the 1930s, but more pertinent to the subject of this chapter is the way in which she constructed an image of the United States as the analogue of Fascist Italy. She achieved this, on the one hand, by registering indications of American appreciation for the features that typified Italian society under Fascism. Narrating her audience with Roosevelt, she reported on his knowledge of Italy and his apparent enthusiasm for the policies that had stimulated 'our national rebirth' (1937: 100) and, when visiting Salt Lake City, she was overwhelmed by the applause that she received from the city's Italian community.³⁸ The other means by which she strengthened her analogy between Italy and the States was to see a reflection of Fascism in American culture and politics. Working on a parallel already present in Ciarlantini's text, she portrayed Roosevelt as the head of a 'constitutional dictatorship' (1937: 184) whose New Deal represented a return to the land, strong government and a controlled economy. If Fascism, as far as she was concerned, was a cultural revolution that had unleashed the creative energies of the Italian people, then in America she testified to feeling a 'fervid, vital sense of élan' (1937: 24). When writing on the skyscrapers of New York [Figure 7.2], she reproduced the same kind of

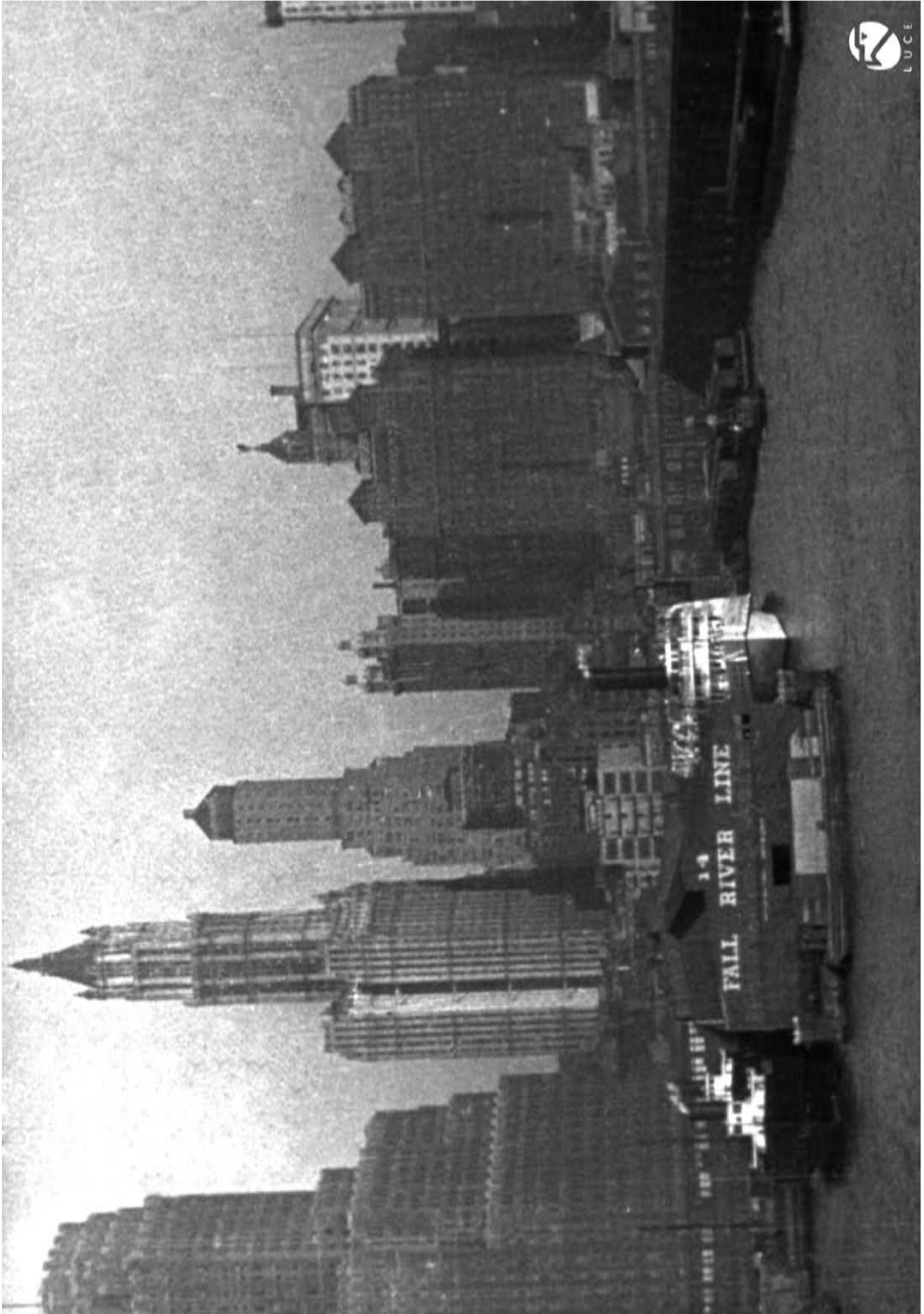


Figure 7.2. View of New York's skyscrapers, circa 1935–40. Reprinted with the permission of the Istituto Luce, Rome and Alinari Archives, Florence.

style that she had, in the past, reserved for the wonders of the ancient world and for the monumental architectural projects recently undertaken in Rome (see Chapters One and Three). The skyscraper was, in her prose, an affirmation of man's power, 'the apotheosis of the superman in man' (33) and the America that she presented was a country of great architects and innovators.³⁹

The construction of the United States as the analogue of Italy was supported throughout by Sarfatti's idea that an Italian cultural influence, exerted over centuries and evident down to the present, was deeply ingrained in manifestations of American creativity. She documented the massive presence of Italians in California, observed that in 1937 both the mayor of New York (Fiorello LaGuardia) and of San Francisco (Angelo Rossi) were of Italian descent, repeated that Washington D.C. was once called Rome and that the Potomac was once named the Tiber. Though she regarded race as 'a dogmatic theology' (225), of little significance in moulding the character of the individual when compared with factors such as custom and culture, the examples of Italian influence that she drew were used to sustain her proposition that 'at the base of every white civilization, one finds the Graeco-Roman ideal' (75). The assertion that Italy and America, despite their divergences, were linked by a common civilization, the origin of which stretched back thousands of years, carried with it – in the political context in which the work was published – two important implications. Firstly, the text clearly suggested that Italy had nothing to fear from the growth of American power and influence. In Sarfatti's opinion, the faith in the future which the Americans displayed, together with their undoubted material success, legitimated the increase of the country's sphere of influence.⁴⁰ Secondly, she referred to her sense of sadness that Italy, given its importance in defining the imagination and the mentality of the West, should occupy so limited a space on the world map, and her apologia for American expansionism implied that Italy's future lay in forging closer ties with the States.

Underlying most of the writing on Russia and America that appeared in Italy in the late 1930s is the idea that imperial expansion was an inevitable aim of all modern societies and that the exportation of a distinct model of humanity would accompany, and in some instances precede, territorial aggrandizement. Alvaro, for example, saw colonization as a necessity and predicted that Soviet Russia would attempt to emulate America in expanding the range of its influence by flooding the world with its mass-produced goods (1943: 146).⁴¹ Sarfatti participated in the issue of what states had the right to colonize not only with her argument concerning the Graeco-Roman ideal but also by articulating her belief that only profoundly religious peoples could

successfully embark on the colonizing process since they were sustained by the presence of the divine and possessed of a transcendental conception of life. Her writing also suggested that the model of the human being that lay behind the Fascist project was one that shared important elements of commonality with the pioneering ideal that was deeply imbedded in American culture. Indeed, there are passages in her work where she seems to be using the United States as a means of defining rhetorically her own perception of Italy and of its future. She defined America as 'a new Rome' imbued with a spirit of 'determination, exploration, sacrifice and conquest' (1937: 239), a country possessed of a 'new spiritual unity' (227) and whose 'adventurous and bellicose youth' was 'bursting with energy' (238). Throughout the narration of her journey she professed her admiration for what she saw as the optimism and enthusiasm of ordinary Americans. Most significantly of all, her description of American women offered no less than a typology of the committed Fascist woman. In the chapter 'Eva in America', she defined the pioneering spirit of the first European women to settle in America and she compared their determination with that of their 'southern sister', the Fascist icon, Anita Garibaldi.⁴² She admired the range of professions that American women followed with 'disciplined, obstinate and energetic force' (203), affirming that they had attained the status of equality through struggle, and, interpreting their apparent forwardness as a 'necessary virtue', she wrote of having encountered in America some of 'the strongest examples of femininity' that she had ever had the chance to 'venerate' (203).

By the time in which they were published, Sarfatti's views on America were out of step with the direction in which Mussolini's foreign policy was leading the country. Involvement in the Spanish Civil War against the side with whom the sympathies of the democratic powers lay and, more significantly, rapprochement with Nazi Germany in the late 1930s indicated a path that was at odds with any alignment with the United States. The set of observations that were closer to official thinking on the eve of the Second World War and, owing to their mode of dissemination, far more widely read, were those of Emilio Cecchi. Between 1938 and 1939 he published a series of reports on America in the *Corriere della Sera* and these dispatches, there were 51 in total, were later printed in book form under the title of *America amara* [Bitter America].⁴³ The articles that were published reflected the journey that their author had undertaken through America in 1937–1938 and which had taken him first to New York, then to Baltimore and Washington, then down to Virginia and South Carolina. Subsequently he had travelled to Chicago and finally he returned to the Art History Faculty in Berkeley, where he

had been a guest in 1931, to deliver another series of lectures. In the course of his travels, he examined the industrial fabric of the country, the modalities of union organization, American foreign policy, the effects of the New Deal, the condition of the country's universities and cities. In his guise as an established critic, he considered in detail the kind of literary production that was then emerging from the States.

More than in his earlier writings on Mexico, Greece or Italy, Cecchi claimed, in the preface to *America amara*, merely to observe the different facets of the country as they appeared to him, and to this end he accumulated a wealth of statistical and factual information. But, in the words of Donald Heiney, the work that he produced was so selective and so anti-American as to seem 'downright dishonest to any reader who examines it in the post-Fascist era' (1964: 35). More perhaps than dishonest, the work – despite its protestation of empiricism – interpreted the United States according to a clearly discernible strategy. In the same way that writers like Alvaro and Scarfoglio produced a comprehensive picture of Russia under Stalin by tracing what they regarded as the link between society and individual mentality, so Cecchi attempted to relate his meetings with groups of Americans or his observation of particular phenomena to an underlying economic, religious and social system. While Sarfatti had admired what she saw as the pioneering spirit of the Americans, he considered U.S. society to be based on the 'puritanical' principles of the founding fathers but argued that these principles had been moulded by the 'impact of extreme natural forces' (1943: 292) and that during the struggle 'to colonize the new land' they had degenerated to such an extent that they no longer offered a meaningful framework that could structure the intellectual or emotional life of the individual.⁴⁴

His analysis of contemporary American fiction (1943: 123–31) allowed him to elaborate explicitly on these points. While he recognized the exceptional degree of formal experimentation in the writing of Faulkner, Steinbeck, Cain or Hemingway, he nevertheless claimed that their works reflected the decadence of American culture. The sinister nature of the action and the emotional conflict in works such as Faulkner's *Pylon* (1934) or in Cain's *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1934) allowed him to draw the conclusion that a combination of the hard years of the Depression, the weakening of the taboos of the Puritan religion, the excessive attainment of social freedoms, had – at the level of individual consciousness – resulted in the development of destructive and suicidal inclinations. Tracing the derivation of recent fiction from the tradition of Hawthorne and Melville, he suggested that the colonizing myths of the frontier had degenerated into stories of murder and perversity; the figure of the pioneer had become 'a gangster, a

bootlegger, a murderer' (127). The representation of the relations between the sexes in the work of a whole generation of writers was the most compelling evidence of a society whose members had increasingly become the victims of their own unregulated impulses and desires. He wrote:

Caduto, in massima, il pudore sociale, e non essendo d'altronde subentrata una sincera capacità di godere, si ha una sorta di gelido e sfrenato paganesimo, che si è messo sotto i piedi tutti i divieti, interni ed esterni: un paganesimo di mera violenza, senza respiro di felicità. (1943: 127).

[Social restraint having all of a sudden lost its power, and there having evolved no sincere capacity for enjoyment, one is left with a sort of gelid and uninhibited paganism, which has trodden over all taboos, whether internal or external: a paganism of mere violence, without any sense of contentment.]

America amara contains the narration of meetings with people from a variety of walks of life and from a selection of different States: Cecchi engaged in intimate conversation with distinguished members of Californian and New England society; he conversed with academics on both the East and the West Coast; he spoke with some influential politicians, priests and businessmen. Yet, in all these encounters, he saw the conversation and behaviour of the people to whom he spoke as evincing the continuing strength of puritanical religious concepts as well as their corruption. He reiterated his belief that the Puritanism of the original colonizers had provided no strong philosophy of collective behaviour beyond a 'certain external conformism' and that it had, by contrast, isolated the individual and left him or her free to pursue their own 'delirious' fantasies. He portrayed people as being imprisoned within a limited or strange mental universe; he conveyed a sense of a distorted mode of perception by focussing on an apparent oddity of physical appearance or behaviour and he tended to use the material environment that surrounded a particular figure as means of suggesting metaphorically the obsessions of that figure.⁴⁵ He was also fond of revealing what he believed were the disparities between external appearance and inner reality. While he was, like Sarfatti, attracted by the opulence and apparent sophistication of many of the figures he met in California, he was keen to affirm that his initial impression was, for the most part, superficial: beyond an alluring façade, he purported to discover depression, bleakness and solitude.⁴⁶

From the often highly imaginative characterization of individuals, Cecchi expanded his range to deliver a series of judgements on whole groups of people. When lecturing on Art History at Berkeley, he was struck by the ignorance of the students he taught and he wrote of

American academics as living in ‘an obtuse conformism’ and within the confines of ‘a servitude of opinion’ (1943: 51–52). He went so far as to claim that American intellectuals did not have the cultural basis to think seriously about matters and that they were merely interested in feeling ‘mentally and materially secure’ (51). On his journey to the Ford Motor Company in Edgewater, he observed that Americans naturally behaved like automata. His travelogue painted a picture of a country whose inhabitants, with all their apparently strange and irrational inclinations, reflected their society’s lack a cohesive, hierarchical structure. In his discussion of the intellectual philosophy underlying Roosevelt’s policies, he quoted at length from the theoretical writings of Adolf Berle, claiming that an economic system based on private ownership was regulated by a certain sense of responsibility so long as capital remained in the hands of its effective owner but that the buying and selling of shares in companies removed the possibility of stability since ownership was indirect and motivated by the desire for liquidity.⁴⁷ The contention that he added was that an economic system based on private interest – which had no incentive to consider the greater good of the nation’s finances – was mirrored by what he considered to be the atomized and irresponsible moral/religious character of American society.

America amara documented a series of violent social phenomena with the attention of the observer being drawn in particular to the problem of organized crime in the 1920s and 1930s. Cecchi referred in some detail to the most notorious episodes of mob terror from the wars between rival groups of gangsters in New York and Chicago and to the kidnapping and murder of the children of Mattson, Cash and Lindbergh. The impact of these descriptions was intensified by the selection of photographs that accompanied the writing: one showed the corpses of two murdered members of the Sheldon gang, another the removal of the body of Jack Diamond, while another represented an execution in Missouri. The interpretation that followed the description of these events suggested that they were merely the most dramatic reflection of the failure of American society to develop a binding sense of the collective. Asking how such deleterious groups could continue to exist within the confines of the modern state and quoting from J. Edgar Hoover’s preface to Courtney Ryley Cooper’s *Ten Thousand Public Enemies* (1935), he pointed to inefficiencies within the Police Department, to a legal system that contained laws designed to protect established criminals but above all he emphasized Hoover’s view that the root cause for the persistence of gangsterism in America was the infiltration of politics by organized crime. Claiming that it was terrible for the Chief of Police of one of the most powerful nations of the world to make such an admission, he drew

a contrast between the highly advanced level of material progress that was everywhere apparent in America and what he regarded as the moral and cultural backwardness of the country. In his words:

Si considera la civiltà americana come moralmente e giuridicamente coeva con quelle estreme modernità. Mentre dobbiamo ripetere che si tratta di una civiltà ... ancora primordiale: tutta lacune e contrasti. (1943: 163)

[One tends to consider the American civilization as being the moral and juridical equivalent of the examples of extreme material modernity that one constantly witnesses. But we must repeat that it is a civilization ... that is in many respects primordial – full of lacunae and contrasts.]

Cecchi also devoted some space to discussing the relations between the different ethnic groups that constituted American society. His consideration of this area was partial: he said very little on the Hispanic community in California, nothing on native Americans and nothing on the Italian community in New York.⁴⁸ But his observations on the racial composition of the States reflected official thinking in the late 1930s in two important respects: he implied support for Mussolini's demographic campaign by enumerating the perils of the declining birth-rate of the Anglo-Saxon population and he maintained that racial tension was present at all levels of American society. With accompanying documentation supplied by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, he gave a vivid account of the racially motivated violence in some southern States, describing lynching as an example of 'diabolical madness', a form of 'puritanical hysteria' and, referring to the work of the French political writer André Siegfried, he claimed that Texas, Georgia and South Carolina, while seeming to be states of the twentieth century, were in effect countries where the pogrom persisted.⁴⁹ Despite the clarity of his condemnation of persecution, expressed not only in the course of his journey to the South but also on the occasion of his visit to Howard University in Washington, Cecchi was not in advance of his time. Other essays of his displayed the strength of his tendency to think in terms of stereotypes: reflecting on the demonstrations in Harlem against the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, he expressed the opinion that African Americans were highly susceptible to Socialist or Communist agitation, and in describing what he believed to be the inevitable effects of the racial diversity of the States, he implied a belief in the superiority of a racially homogeneous society.⁵⁰ More significantly still, he pointed to the number of high-ranking Jewish officials in Roosevelt's administration, claiming that tension between America's Jewish and Anglo-Saxon communities was destined to rise and that the sympathy expressed by many Americans for German and Italian Jews was in reality hypocritical. The article in

which these opinions were put forward appeared on the front page of the *Corriere della Sera* on 28 July 1938, that is, at a time when both editorial interventions and commentaries written by the leading anthropologists of the regime were insistently arguing for the need for Italians to develop a racial consciousness and as measures restricting the freedom of Jewish Italians were announced.⁵¹

The younger generation of writers – Elio Vittorini, Cesare Pavese and Giaime Pintor – who were responsible for creating an image of the United States, derived largely from their reading of contemporary American fiction, as a vehicle for expressing their opposition to Fascism were certainly aware of the devices on which Cecchi's writing relied.⁵² Vittorini later described him as an old-fashioned person, someone who was unable to get to grips with America because he lacked the facility to recognize the workings of a modern society.⁵³ In his posthumously published writings, Pintor noted how Cecchi's judgements were often based on criteria of aesthetic appreciation and how his extremely traditional habits of perception and composition meant that he was blind to the underlying significance of the newer culture and was ultimately able only to document its surface reality.⁵⁴ Pointing to the difference between the perception of America that he shared with his fellow writers and the picture that *America amara* offered of a degenerate and dangerous civilization, he wrote:

Laddove Cecchi ha creato un museo di orrori e decadenza e ha disegnato un mondo al quale è impossibile credere, abbiamo sentito una voce profondamente simile alla nostra, la voce dei veri amici e dei contemporanei immediati. (1965: 150)

[Where Cecchi has scrupulously accumulated a chamber of horrors, where he has isolated decadence and disease and constructed a world in which it is impossible to believe, we have heard a voice that is similar to our own, the voice of true friends and contemporaries.]

Conclusion

The critique of Bolshevism or American capitalism that was communicated by the majority of the travel texts on which I have focussed may, by the late 1930s, have become fairly orthodox, but it was not without its detractors within Fascism – as the position adopted by Sarfatti proves – or without its ambiguities. Most commentators were prepared to acknowledge the achievements of the first Five-Year Plan or to recognize the inevitability of some of the methods of production that had, in the past, secured a high level of material advancement in the United States. Alvaro stated that Russia had made some of the gains through Bolshevism that the rest of Europe had acquired as a result of the French Revolution and that it was undeniable that

the material conditions of people's lives had improved since the time of the Tsars (1943: 152, 199). In the writing of so staunch a critic of the States as Emilio Cecchi, there were flickers of the same admiration for industrial modernization that had formed the basis of Frateili's observations on Germany (1937) or which had celebrated the attempted colonization of Ethiopia. By the same token, most writers could recognize elements of Fascism within the structures of the New Deal or within Communism. Even Sandro Volta, whose work on the Spanish Civil War (see Chapter Five) marked him as an implacable opponent of Bolshevism, expressed a certain admiration for the functioning of the collective farms that he was taken to see (1943: 109–11).

The hostility that was so often expressed towards the future that Soviet Russia or the United States seemed to exemplify was centred, for the most part, on the model of humanity that each writer claimed to witness. Most writers contended that both Soviet Communism and American capitalism, rather than offering a blueprint for economic improvement, constituted a threat to a notion of the human being that had evolved over centuries. This point was made explicitly by descriptions of the suppression of individuality in Stalin's Russia and by the portrayal of the capitalist state as a political body that abandoned its citizens to an unwarranted and ultimately self-destructive level of personal freedom. It was made by denunciations of the perceived breakdown of the traditional framework of society and by lengthy speculations on the long-term effects of altered relations between the sexes. Especially in the more literary travelogues, the sense of an unfamiliar and intimidating human construct was conveyed to the reader by the very structure of the text. In the representation of encounters with people who belonged to the culture that was visited, the writer's self-description was as important as that of any people who were seen. The author's mood, perspective, sense of self became the norm against which the perceived unnaturalness of either the Soviet or American way of being in the world was contrasted. Gaetano Ciocca assessed the feverishness that animated those involved in the implementation of the Five-Year Plan against his own pragmatism, rationality and sense of the conflicting desires behind human motivation. Cecchi positioned himself as the upholder of some of the most profoundly rooted values of Western Europe, while Alvaro testified to seeing Russia through the eyes of a person who belonged to a civilization where the 'human being was not a negligible quantity' and where the importance of the individual was the mark against which the life of the community could be measured (1943: 200).

The subordination of the human being to the requirements of machines, the disparity between the ideal of a society and its lived reality,

the horror of a world where national cohesion was being destroyed from within or where the erasure of personal identity seemed a goal in itself made many of the travel texts on Russia and the United States read like journeys to two vast and encroaching examples of dystopia. When Giaime Pintor described *America amara* as the description of a chamber of horrors, he suggested that Cecchi fully intended to confront his reader with an image of a society where the natural order of things had been grotesquely and at times terrifyingly distorted. But the awareness of constructing a written representation of an alienating model of society was shared among other writers and observers. Ciocca's judgement on Bolshevism contained numerous descriptions of the physical and mental effects of poverty and affirmed that the destiny of Russia was written deep down in the soul of a people who were rendered similar to one another by the common experience of misery (1933: 174). In attempting to give an impression of the scale of collectivization in Russia and its intended consequences, Scarfoglio (1941: 79) referred explicitly to H.G. Wells' *A Modern Utopia* (1905), arguing that while the enormous social experiment being carried out across Russia was motivated by a vision of a perfect future it had succeeded in creating a level of human suffering that had no equivalent in Western Europe. In his view, the Soviet model of modernity represented an example only insofar as it proved to anyone who observed its working at close quarters that human beings were not merely figures within an economic calculation (1941: 407).

As the work of Ruth Ben-Ghiat has shown (1996; 2001) many Italian intellectuals in the 1930s were inclined to believe Mussolini's assertion that Fascism offered a pathway towards modernity that was distinct from liberal capitalism on the one hand and from Soviet Communism on the other. The persuasiveness of the argument that Fascism offered a 'third way' towards the future was bolstered considerably by the claim that the regime's tutelage of national economic interest did not place the individual in the peril of the unregulated excesses of capitalism or of the materialist ethos of Communism. Indeed, as Ben-Ghiat argues, the regime maintained that it had inaugurated a 'moral revolution' that catered for the 'whole person' (1996: 294–99), defending the spirituality of individual and national identity from economic and ideological systems that threatened their very existence. By presenting an Orwellian vision of totalitarianism in Russia or by pointing to disturbing elements of American society, much travel writing of the 1930s clearly helped, whether intentionally or incidentally, to sustain a notion of the positive distinctiveness of Fascism and the route towards modernity that it claimed to exemplify. But the counter-model of Italian society that was, with varying degrees of explicitness, present in all the texts that were produced

on Russia and the United States was never entirely simple. It tended to vary considerably between the work of one writer and another and it could betray a disquieting, if not fully acknowledged, perception of awkward similarities between what was criticized and what was defended.

In the writing of Ciocca both Communist and liberal economic systems were inherently unbalanced: in one case, the state sought to subjugate every action of the individual, while in the other it was the individual who was not subject to the proper regulatory power of the state. By contrast, Italian Fascism represented a political model that did not set out to destroy the pre-existing economic base so that it could implement its own philosophy of production but sought to achieve its aims through 'consensus and faith' rather than coercion (1933: 73). In the ideal of corporativism that he outlined there was no reason for antagonism between employer and employee; all elements of society worked in collaboration with the intention of gaining the maximum yield from the nation's forces of production so that this, in turn, could be equitably distributed (1933: 33, 269–75). Accepting that Bolshevism and Fascism were alike in their promotion of a strong state, he nevertheless contended that in Italy the role of the state was to facilitate the private initiatives of the individual so far as they were of benefit to the common good. Through the power of the corporativist apparatus, the state accrued 'the energy and authority' of its subjects, while 'guiding and protecting' their work (271). Its purpose was not only to ensure their physical well-being but to tender, through the pursuit of its vision of the nation's future, to their spiritual needs.⁵⁵ Though he was less willing to equate Fascism with corporativism, Alvaro's interpretation of Communism coincided with that of Ciocca insofar as he saw the rapidity with which a version of modernization was being pursued as bringing with it the destruction of a millennial sense of individuality. In the conclusion to his journey he defined the most important problem confronting the age in which he lived as that of finding a way in which the needs of the individual could be reconciled with those of the masses rather than allowing the requirements of the crowd to stifle the human being (1943: 200).⁵⁶ The vision of the vastness and anonymity of the collective farms that he visited across Russia contrasted, by implication, with the model of rural development, on the reclaimed land of the Pontine Marshes, that he had enthusiastically described in his earlier work, *Terra nuova* [New Earth] (1935b).⁵⁷

The assertion that was made by Cecchi that Americans, bereft of a deep-laid system of values, were prey to their own anxieties and delusions was accompanied by the insidious suggestion that the culture to which the observer belonged did possess a strong set of ideals – ideals that structured both the collective functioning of society and the inner life

of the individual. Pintor's criticism of Cecchi was precisely that this 'indefatigable traveller' (1965: 150) was unable to form a judgement on another country that did not imply the superiority of the tradition of which he considered himself to be a part. The picture of Italy under Fascism that was created, albeit implicitly, in opposition to the American example was one where a philosophy of human identity that had its antecedents in antiquity and its continuation through Catholicism was not imperilled by the decline of established religion. In common with Soldati (1935), Cecchi described the material evidence of social depravation. In one passage (1943: 151–59) he deployed the full extent of his repertory of strange and disturbing images to evoke the menacing atmosphere that he believed he detected in a visit to the Bowery, insinuating that such scenes had no equivalent in Italy.⁵⁸ Lastly, the authoritarianism of the Italian state – the author defined himself as always having been on the side of the *carabiniere* on horseback (1943: 162) – guaranteed a respect for its institutions, a respect that *America amara* portrayed as being often alarmingly absent from the democratic alternative to Fascism.

Less dramatic but in some ways more complex than Cecchi's provocative portrayal of the United States was Scarfoglio's critique of Soviet Russia. The complexity of his critique stemmed in part from its combination of both left and right-wing thinking. Citing Marx on the deplorable effects on humanity of unbridled capitalism (1941: 381), Scarfoglio claimed that Soviet Communism legitimated the exploitation of labour by the state and that far from altering the worker's reified connection with production it had intensified it. Yet, his claim to witness a system that oppressed the worker sat with the defence of a very traditional understanding of society where the challenge to established religion and to the distinctions defining the roles occupied by men and women was flatly and repeatedly denounced. In his account of how Mussolini's Italy differed from Stalin's Russia (1941: 388) he accepted that capitalism remained the economic system under Fascism but he contended that the function of government, the administration of justice, the role of the family and the ethical/intellectual life of the individual had not been sacrificed on the altar of production.⁵⁹ While at one level his 'Russian tour' seemed to express the same subservience to the regime that was evinced by other works belonging to the genre, it did – albeit at a less obvious level – imply the ability to see some degree of similarity between Soviet orthodoxy and the religion of the state in Italy. Whereas a writer like Pietro Maria Bardi (1933) defined his purpose as seeing the Soviet Union through the eyes of a Fascist, Scarfoglio was generally more reticent about revealing his political identity. At no stage in his text did he define himself explicitly as a supporter of Mussolini, and imbricated

within his awareness of the essential political structures of modernity, there was a subtle criticism of Fascism and a defence of pragmatism. The conclusion to his work, while ostensibly referring only to the Soviet Union, spoke of an age that was dominated by the continual search for ideal templates on which to model reality, by the passion for creating transcendental hierarchies, and by the minute planning of spatial structures into which empirical reality refused to be forced (1941: 409).

Notes

1. For a detailed discussion of the range of writing on the Soviet Union and the implications of its representation concerning the economic and ideological direction of Fascism, see the work of Luciano Zani (1990), Marcello Flores (1990) and Jeffrey Schnapp (2000). Schnapp (32–33) sees the literature on Soviet Russia as taking off as a genre in the 1920s with works being published by such well-known writers and journalists as Raffaele Calzini (1927) and Curzio Malaparte (1929). In the 1930s the list of Italian visitors to Russia was a lengthy one and included such names as Ettore Lo Gatto (1934) and Vittorio Beonio-Brocchieri (1939).
2. As Flores notes (1985: xiii–iv), Bardi was, like Ciocca, a supporter of corporativism and was an active participant in the debate (from 1931) on the relative merits of Bolshevism and Fascism that occurred in the pages of Bottai's *Critica Fascista*.
3. The factory was inaugurated in March 1932 and regarded as one of the most imposing achievements of the first Five-Year Plan. The experience of Ciocca in Russia and his representation of his work there is explored comprehensively by Schnapp (2000: 32–43).
4. The first edition appeared in 1934. Quotations are taken from the 1941 edition of the work.
5. All quotations from *I maestri del diluvio* (1935a) are taken from the 1943 reprint of the text, *Viaggio in Russia*.
6. For a discussion of the lines along which the long tradition of Italian writing on the United States has followed, see D. Heiney (1964), G. Massara (1976) and E. Franzina (1996).
7. The reasons for Borgese's move to America and the nature of his relationship with Fascism are, as Parisi indicates, examined by Fernando Mezzetti (1978).
8. The contending ideas of modernity within Italian Fascism and their dependence on other models of future development have been studied with singular acuity by Ruth Ben-Ghiat, (2001). The travel texts that are the object of analysis in this chapter support her interpretation of Fascism as a system that was able to garner the support of many intellectuals because 'it addressed both the hopes and fears of the modern age' and because it 'expressed tensions within modernity between the push toward progress and the fear of degeneration, the demand for emancipation and the impulse to preserve order' (2001: 8).

9. Russia was, for Gaetano Ciocca, the largest laboratory of social experiments in the world (1933: 34). He testified to the enormous problem confronting humanity as to which path it should decide to follow (208) and he noted a desire in every part of the globe for information on the Soviet experiment (93).
10. Ciocca also wrote on his observation of people who appeared to be 'shadows of the past, hiding within themselves their own terrible anxiety' (1933: 173). For a definition of 'former people', see Ward (1993: xx).
11. For a recent account of the events surrounding the death of Kirov, see Simon Sebag Montefiore's biography of Stalin (2004: 107–47).
12. A footnote from the 1943 edition of Alvaro's text clarifies the author's awareness of the peculiar time in which his journey through Russia took place.
13. He wrote in the preface to the 1943 edition that: '[The character of] daily life is written in the faces of the people who pass by, on the paving of the streets, in the façade of buildings, in the habits of people' (1943: 6–7). The conviction that the essence of the place was to be seen in the behaviour of the people who belonged to it informed his earlier works of narrative fiction, in particular *Gente in Aspromonte* (1930).
14. The similarity of the itinerary that was followed by Western travellers to the U.S.S.R. indicates how little deviation was allowed.
15. For a collected edition of Alvaro's writings as a theatre critic, see Alvaro (1976).
16. Ciocca was similarly impressed by the Soviet system of recreational parks (1933: 168–69).
17. The major frustration of the journey to Russia for Scarfoglio (1941: 46) was his inability to speak to individual Russians. Describing walking down one of Leningrad's streets he wrote: 'The street is wide, badly paved and dusty, like all the streets in Leningrad: the people look poor with sad faces and gentle eyes: how I would like to be able to speak to them!' (1941: 88). On the perception of people's terror in speaking to a foreign journalist, see also Volta (1943: 186–87).
18. Scarfoglio claimed (1941: 409–10) that it had not been his intention to create a lurid picture of the horrors of Soviet Russia and that he had not concentrated his attention on the actions of GPU (the predecessor of the NKVD) or the cost in human lives of collectivization. Alvaro referred more obliquely to the brutality of collectivization (1943: 126–27).
19. Scarfoglio was writing before the phenomenon of 'Stakhanovism'.
20. In many works on the U.S.S.R. one can find a heavy critique of the American model of production; see, in particular, Ciocca (1933: 215, 251).
21. He argued that if the success of the United States was built on the power of acquisition of the average citizen, then the Russian system was doomed to failure since the fixed salaries that were paid were barely sufficient to support a worker let alone to fuel an economic boom. He depicted a workforce which accepted, in the hope of a better future, pay and conditions that no worker from Western Europe would tolerate and which in his view equated to slave labour (1943: 150–51).
22. Ciocca's book was, as Schnapp records (2000: 37–38), reviewed by Mussolini for *Il Popolo d'Italia* (19 September 1933) and the endorsement was printed at the beginning of subsequent editions of the text.
23. See Davies (1997: 73–90) on the persistence of religious faith in Russia.

24. Alvaro was equally sceptical about the distance between Bolshevism and established forms of religious observance. He suggested that while Russians spoke of materialism, many cultural manifestations that they showed bore the mark of an Orthodox mentality (1943: 33).
25. Scarfoglio claimed (1941: 194) that there were really two currents within Communism: one rigidly centralist, unitary and absolutist, the other, inspired by Herzen, leading to nihilism and the negation of all moral, religious and therefore social duties.
26. Alvaro's writing contains a series of pictures of life in a totalitarian society (for example, 1943: 110–11) that are not dissimilar to the world famously described by Orwell (1949).
27. For a discussion of the diplomatic relations between Italy and the United States during the interwar period, see Schmitz (1988). Schmitz shows the extent to which Mussolini enjoyed a good deal of esteem among American politicians and business people in the 1920s as the man who had repulsed Communism. He documents how Republican leaders were prepared to ignore the destruction of democratic rights and institutions in Italy, charting how American investment in Italy rose until 1929 and how it was not until the Italian invasion of Ethiopia that diplomatic relations became severely strained.
28. Among those who subscribed to this view of the States were, as Gentile enumerates (1993: 10–11), Catholic reactionaries like Giovanni Papini and intellectuals such as Ardengo Soffici who were close to the *strapaese* [superprovince] movement, with its defence of the traditional values of a rural society.
29. The list of figures who were prepared to embrace this view of America, included for a time Mussolini himself. On Mussolini's readiness to make an analogy between American democracy and the system of government in Italy under Fascism, and on his conversion from a certain form of Americanism to anti-Americanism, see Gentile (1993: 15, 18–19). Gentile sees the positive sense of Americanism as developing within Fascism until 1938 (23).
30. Ciarlantini's ambiguity on the United States, reflected his earlier Americanism, see Gentile (1993: 16).
31. In his words, Italy had become the seedbed for ideas on the development of society and the voice of 'white civilization' (1934: 337–38).
32. As his work explains, Soldati first came to the United States on a scholarship in 1929 to study Art History at Columbia. He was able to extend his stay for over a year by doing such jobs as working in a cafeteria near to the University. All quotations from *America, primo amore* are taken from the 1985 edition of the work.
33. Ciarlantini had described American cities as more dangerous than a jungle (1934: 307). Focusing on New York, Calzini (1937) drew a direct correlation between a materialistic search for happiness and a weird and disturbing landscape. Even Sarfatti had produced a picture of the scarcely veiled ferocity of Chicago (1937: 85).
34. On the significance of Soldati's articles in this context, see Ben-Ghiat (1996: 298).
35. It is clear that the two were not close associates. In his notebooks (1976: 490, 545) Cecchi mentions Sarfatti only twice, on one occasion giving a slightly ironic portrait of her as they found themselves to be fellow travellers on the liner 'Rex' on route to New York in November 1937.

36. On Cecchi's admission to Bottai that he had made an error of judgement in signing the Manifesto of Anti-Fascist Intellectuals in 1925, see Mirella Serri's work (2002: 144).
37. Sarfatti's text on America (1937) was the account of a tour of the States that she had undertaken in 1934: a more detailed account of her tour is to be found in the work of Philip Cannistraro and Brian Sullivan (1993: 418–43) and Simona Urso (2003: 214–31). Cannistraro and Sullivan document the level of official recognition that was reserved for Sarfatti 'as if she were Mussolini's consort' (430) and they detail the stages through which she became 'drunk on America' (418).
38. Sarfatti was granted an audience with Roosevelt on 15 April 1934.
39. As such, the country bore an abstract resemblance to the regime's notion, emblazoned on the façade of the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana at the heart of EUR, of a 'nation of poets, artists, heroes, navigators, scientists'.
40. On America as an imperial power in the early part of the twentieth century, see Niall Ferguson's *Colossus* (2004).
41. He also considered what he detected as the rise in Russian nationalism as part of a process that would, despite Communist anti-colonial rhetoric, lead to imperial expansion (1943: 35–36).
42. On the importance of Anita Garibaldi, see Chapter Three.
43. *America amara* was initially published by Sansoni in 1939 (quotations are taken from the 1943 edition). The book, as Donald Heiney has documented, was to become highly successful, replacing Mario Soldati's *America primo amore* as the semi-official Italian picture of the United States (1964: 36).
44. Another good example of the representation of the clash of religions over the governance of space is Beniamino de Ritis', *La terza America* (1937).
45. For example, when narrating a visit to the extensive collection of antiques of an unnamed East coast millionaire ('Il vecchio collezionista', 96–103), he saw the collection as the spatial expression of a pathological desire to accumulate that was untempered by any understanding of history.
46. In this respect, Cecchi's writing often betrayed a similarity to that of Soldati. In one article ('Ritratto equestre', 286–91) he reported the conversation that he had with a rich member of the State's elite in order to reveal that, beneath her evident wealth, she concealed a sense of hopeless frustration.
47. The most substantial consideration of the New Deal was to be found in the chapter 'Distruzione della proprietà' [The destruction of property] (1943: 42–48). Among the texts by Adolf A. Berle Jr. that Cecchi quoted from were *The Modern Corporation and Private Property* (1932) and *Liquid Claims and National Wealth* (1934).
48. In the chapter of *America amara* devoted to the consideration of racial issues (1943: 90–96), the original inhabitants of America were defined as a race that was in terminal decline. In the preface to the book, Cecchi suggested that readers who were interested in the Italian community of America should refer to the work by Amerigo Ruggiero, *Italiani d'America* (1937).
49. Cecchi's observations were contained in the article '5000 lynchings' (1943: 80–86). The work by André Siegfried that Cecchi appears to refer to is, *America Comes of Age* (1930).

50. The place in which Cecchi's writings first appeared locates them, quite literally, within the dominant discourse of the time. One article, 'L'Agape nera' [The black parochial feast], was prefaced by the editorial comment: 'What violence, what tragedies, what frightening compromises are hidden within the unnatural accumulation of diverse races' (*Corriere della Sera*, 23 September 1938, 1).
51. See the editorial, 'Razze e razzismo', *Corriere della Sera*, 21 July 1938, 1. See also Lidio Cipriani's 'Razza e civiltà', *Corriere della Sera*, 31 July 1938. On 6 August the front page of the *Corriere* was given over to outlining the motivation behind the Fascist policy of the 'the defence of the race'.
52. The writings of the 'Americanisti', as these writers were known, have received a good deal of critical attention; see, in particular, Fernandez (1969) and Carducci (1973). Keen to assimilate the literary techniques of modern American writers in their own writing, they created an image of the country through a reading of contemporary American fiction. Their construction of the States served as a counter site to the myths of space communicated by the regime. America, for these writers, functioned explicitly as an other to the old world; it functioned as a metaphor for a different kind of Italy and a different kind of psychological reality. In the words of Giaime Pintor: 'This America has no need of Columbus, it is inside us, it is the land to which we aspire with the same hope and the same trust as the first emigrants' (1965: 149).
53. The letter, quoted by Heiney, is dated 26 November 1962. In 1941 Vittorini published his anthology of American literature under the title of *Americana*. The work appeared too pro-American to the Fascist censors and it was sequestered. The anthology appeared the following year with a number of drastic reductions and with an introduction written by Emilio Cecchi. On Vittorini's Americanism, see Bonsaver (2000: 67–80).
54. Pintor died in 1943 taking part in military action against the Germans. His views on America appear in the collection of writings, *Il sangue d'Europa* (1950). The quotation is taken from the 1965 edition of the work.
55. While Ciocca referred to the brutal utilitarianism of Bolshevism, he defined Mussolini as the 'guarantor of spirituality' (1933: 203). On Giovanni Gentile and the notion of the ethical state that underlies Ciocca's writing here, see A.J. Gregor (2000: 30–33, 73–75).
56. On Alvaro's later novel, *L'uomo è forte* (1938), set in Stalinist Russia, and the way in which it could be read as offering, by implication, a critique of Fascism, see Ben-Ghiat (2001: 143–47).
57. Flores (1985: xvi) sees *Terra nuova* as an indication of Alvaro's ideal of a rural version of Socialism. His earlier fictional work, *Gente in Aspromonte* (1930) focussed on the lives of the agrarian communities of southern Italy.
58. A common feature of much writing on America by sympathizers of Fascism was the concentration on a massive disparity between wealth and destitution in the country. A good example of this type of writing is Paresce's article (1935).
59. Ciocca (1933: 26) saw the excessive rapidity of industrialization as one of the prime causes of the Depression.

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Conclusion

The texts that I have considered do not offer a complete picture of the world as it appeared to the writers and journalists of the interwar years. Though the aim has been to examine aspects of the representation of some of the more significant sites of the period, whole areas of the globe lie outside the scope of the book. A work that set out to provide a comprehensive study of the literature of travel from the 1920s through to the end of the 1930s would have to include a more detailed study of the way in which the European democratic powers were perceived. It would have to extend its analysis beyond India to examine how China and especially Japan, as it began to pursue its ruthless imperial agenda in the 1930s, were written about.¹ It would have to look at the many texts that were written on South America and which imagined an era of greater closeness between Italy and the Italian-speaking communities of the continent.² If the time frame of the works under consideration were extended, then one could chart the intimacy of the connection between travel writing and war reporting. Already in the 1930s, journalists as established as Virgilio Lilli or Lamberto Sorrentino could claim that under Mussolini foreign and war correspondence had started to become indistinguishable, but that process accelerated as Italy annexed Albania in April 1939 and started its campaign against Greece and France in 1940.³ By extending the time frame, it would also be possible to witness the mounting discrepancy between reality and representation as the war began to proceed disastrously on all fronts.⁴ Finally, the analysis of the war reporting that appeared until the collapse of Fascism would provide some indication of the degree to which the most hardened supporters of the regime were prepared to abandon or to retain their beliefs in the face of imminent catastrophe.⁵

Though such questions lie beyond its scope, the study has been concerned with a wide selection of writers, writers who came from different social and political backgrounds, who occupied positions which varied from the relatively humble to the influential and who were driven by conflicting motivations. Many were no doubt willing to obey the constrictions that were imposed upon them and to tailor their

observations to the requirements of propaganda. But despite the controlled conditions under which they wrote and the readiness with which some were prepared to subscribe uncritically to the aims of the regime, it would not be correct to argue that their works offered an interpretation of the contemporary world that merely repeated the ideological statements that emanated from the centre of power. All the writers and journalists whose works I have considered were involved in their own journeys through Fascism – through its cult of the nation, its demographic campaign, its imperial aspirations – and their instincts, inclinations and past affiliations led them along different paths both up to the outbreak of the Second World War and beyond. Their writings, as I suggested in the Introduction, allow us to see the evolution of a core set of beliefs but they also provide us with the opportunity to see how multi-faceted these beliefs could be, how they could be interpreted in different ways, and how they could develop meanings that were often at odds with one another. By way of conclusion, I would like briefly to review the discourse on nationalism and imperialism that emerged, with all its contradictions, from the writings on travel.

There is no doubt that the status and the future of the Italian nation was of prime concern to all those who wrote about travel between the wars. The narration of journeys to places within the mainland, even in the pages of *Le Vie d'Italia*, did not serve merely to highlight the features of the landscape or the curiosities of local history. Those who documented the lie of the land were more concerned with revealing the agricultural and industrial resources that could be drawn upon, with gauging the impact of social policy, with describing recent building projects or plans to recover previously infertile soil. The writing of Corrado Alvaro or Carlo Emilio Gadda in the 1920s and 1930s frequently combined the observation of intricate natural detail with speculation on the eventual effects of state-sponsored reclamation projects. When they wrote about the various strata of the nation's history it was as a means of discovering the tortuous path that led from the past to the present. Most reporting from other countries within Europe and beyond speculated on economic lessons to be learned or on the likely consequences of Italian foreign policy. As the 1930s wore on, the world was posited as a place where one nation, wedded to a particular ideology, vied for domination with another. The American model of economic development was perceived by many as a threat; the tension with the European democracies, heightened by the invasion of Ethiopia, filtered through almost all texts; most commentators anticipated some kind of confrontation with Communism.

Yet, the single most important feature of all this writing was not the fact that it addressed the question of national interest but the way in

which it did so. In this writing the ideology of the regime was identified with the spirit of the nation and the rational was bound strongly together with the irrational. Emilio Gentile's conception of Fascism (1993) as a modern kind of theocracy would not have seemed strange to many of the most prolific commentators of the age. If Carlo Scarfoglio (1941), in his work on the Soviet Union, could define the era in which he was living as one where political movements had succeeded in exercising an awesome power over whole populations by appropriating the symbolic language of declining religions, then other less astute writers could document what they saw as the fusion of nation and religion. At the same time as individual writers described the results of social policy or the appearance of newly built urban centres within Italy, they took their readership on a journey through a narrative history of the nation: through the memory of Rome, through the sacrifice of the First World War, through the resurrection of Italian society under Fascism. At the same time as they discussed the impact of Italy's foreign policy, they involved their readership in a journey through a conflict of civilizations, through the horrors of alternative ideologies or through the dramatized union of national communities. The bringing together of rational considerations with an irrational cult of the nation was accentuated by the emphasis on ritual. The description of military ceremony was a major component of the correspondence from Spain and Ethiopia. In writing that described the appearance of Mussolini, whether in Rome or in Berlin, the attention of every writer was drawn to the mood of the crowd and its liability to rapid shifts of emotion. The fluctuations in the feeling of the crowd or the change in consciousness registered by the individual writer were conveyed through a vocabulary that suggested that he or she had attained some vital contact with the 'soul' of the nation and that the journey had promoted a kind of revelation.

The vision of the nation as it was reflected in the many hundreds of travel texts that were produced in the 1920s and 1930s dictated, to a large extent, the image that the writer sought to convey of him or herself.⁶ In the writing of the most committed male followers – those who were to retain their faith until the end – one witnesses the attempt to fashion an aesthetic self that conforms entirely to an orthodox model of masculinity.⁷ Figures like Mario Appelius, Alessandro Pavolini and Lamberto Sorrentino saw themselves as part of the avant-garde of the Fascist project, keen to be where the drive to expand met with resistance and to tell of their part in the action. Other figures who reported on such public spectacles as Mussolini's visit to Tripoli or Berlin described in detail their willingness to identify both with the crowd and the Duce, thus leaving an image of themselves as the willing participants in the cult of

the leader. In other instances, the depiction of such groups of people as the first settlers in Libya or the soldiers fighting in Spain allowed the writer to assume the role of the interpreter of the national psyche, able to see its presence in the everyday actions of ordinary people. But the impact that belief in the nation as an object of worship exerted on the conception of personal identity that was represented in the texts was most dramatic when travellers of one type or another found themselves confronted with the perceived enemies of the state.

Looking at the texts inspired by journeys to various parts of the world, what becomes clear is the extent of the aversion felt by most journalists towards Communism. There may have been a certain ambiguity in the judgements that were formulated by some of the visitors to the Soviet Union in the 1920s and early 1930s, but as the latter decade wore on and as Italy was drawn into the Spanish Civil War and subsequently into an alliance with Nazi Germany, the language used to describe Stalin's Russia and the reception of Marxist ideas in other parts of the globe became more radical. Images of a plague spreading from Russia through Asia and appearing in places as far apart as Mexico and Spain were rife. In accounts of the war in Spain or in statements on the affinities between Fascism and Nazism, the demonization of Communism assumed racist and specifically anti-Semitic undertones. In the more obtuse descriptions of the clash of opposing world-views, the human being retained little or no autonomy from the political philosophy that he or she embraced. Many texts of the 1930s represented a narrative consciousness that was indifferent to human suffering and that was able to depict the figure of the actual or potential enemy as the fitting object of aggression. The brutality of self-description was most extreme in instances such as Mario Appellius' charting the advance of Italian troops in Ethiopia (1937) or Sandro Volta's depiction (1937) of examples of violence as he reported from the front in Spain.

Though the study of the writing of the period does show the disconcerting facility with which some authors were prepared to take on the attributes of a nationalistic stereotype, there are many instances where conformity was not entirely what it seemed. The self figurations that occur in the work of Alba Felter Sartori and Margherita Sarfatti are among the most interesting to emerge from the corpus of travel texts. While both were believers in the myth of an Italian nation with enhanced power and standing, neither was keen to assume the stereotype of wife and mother that lay at the heart of the demographic campaign. In the record of her journey from Asmara to Mogadishu (1940), Felter Sartori was keen to assert her presence within the area over which she travelled and to prove that she was as intrepid and as tireless as the soldiers and

colonists whom she observed in various imperial outposts. Like every official commentator, she wrote in favour of the empire, never pausing to speculate on its legitimacy. Yet the manner of her enthusiasm for the Italian mission in Africa offered a critique of the model of the colonial woman laboriously prescribed in both the literature and the institutions of the time. The self-proclaimed equal of the male administrators of Italian East Africa, she did not offer an example of the colonial woman as the creator of domestic space in a new but potentially harsh environment. The interest of Sarfatti's writing on travel lies not so much in its definition of a notion of Italian civilization as in the way its author used the language of nationalism as a means of defining herself. Her writing on the architecture of ancient Egypt provided her with the opportunity of speculating on fame and mortality while her visit to Roosevelt's America (1937) gave her the space to outline her own notion of Fascism and the role that she saw women as fulfilling within it. The irony of the vision she offered was that it was already out of step with rapprochement with Nazi Germany and she herself was to prove one of the first exiles from the rising tide of anti-Semitism. As she left Italy for France in fear of the impact of the race laws, she had made the journey from architect of Fascist mythology to victim of its racism.⁸

The allegiance of figures like Feltr Sartori or Sarfatti to the philosophy of nationalism involved a complex process of identification. Similarly complex were the pronouncements of those writers who interpreted Fascism not principally as a revolution that would change Italy's place within the world and every Italian's sense of belonging to the nation but as a means of government that would ensure the continuance of a familiar model of society and of human identity in the face of the more sinister encroachments of modernity. The conceptualization of Fascism as the guarantor of the values of Western civilization was perhaps most evident in the correspondence from the Spanish Civil War where Italian intervention was frequently legitimated as the defence of order against anarchy and of established religion against materialism. The same impulse to associate Fascism with the protection of the deepest traditions of Italian society, as I have discussed in the last chapter, found expression in the majority of those texts that were written by travellers to the United States and to the Soviet Union in the years running up to the outbreak of war. In this atmosphere of ideological polarization, many travellers constructed an image of the societies they toured where the organized practice of religion had either been distorted or had been subject to a violent process of abolition, and where the relationship between the state and its subjects was characterized as ineffectual or as oppressive. The various portraits of human beings dislocated from a

sense of the collective past or bewildered by the extent of their individual freedoms facilitated the argument, which as Ben-Ghiat (2001) has shown was common to many texts of the period, that Fascism stood for continuity with tradition and that it offered a model of human development that was neither disconcerting nor dangerous. Corrado Alvaro, who wrote (1935) in praise of the utopian social projects pursued in Italy in the early 1930s, was repelled by the vision of humanity that motivated the Bolshevik ideal and contended that the origin of human identity lay in the religious tradition that Italian Fascism did not violate.⁹

But of all the writers whose work the study has addressed, the most sophisticated and ultimately most enigmatic was Emilio Cecchi. Though, as I have noted, he signed the Manifesto of anti-Fascist Intellectuals, he nevertheless became one of the most prolific journalists of the interwar years. Though he could legitimately define himself as a European intellectual – with experience of having worked in an array of foreign countries – he was prepared to join the Italian Academy at a time when, as Ben-Ghiat has documented (2001: 151, 260–61), it was producing substantial amounts of anti-Jewish propaganda. He was also among the delegation of Italian writers who spent a week in Weimar at the Nazis' expense in October 1942.¹⁰ His work as a travel writer testified to a sensitivity to the contingencies of perception but at the same time as he was prepared to see social and cultural phenomena in different perspectives he retained a capacity to be deeply disturbed by what he regarded as alien or unfamiliar. One of the greatest contradictions that ran through his work was his propensity to celebrate the power of collective structures to mould the individual at the same time as his own writings represented all the peculiarities of their author's tastes, moods and preoccupations. A similarly strong contradiction lay in the movement his work reflected between an attachment to order and a fascination with deviance, incongruity and difference. The intricacy of his prose, the complexity of the autobiographical self that it fashioned, the breadth of knowledge of disparate art forms that informed all his work makes the nature of his identification with Fascism highly problematic, it also accounts for the way in which he was able to retain his status as a leading journalist and critic after the Second World War, and indeed until his death in 1966, without his reputation coming under intense scrutiny.

The appropriation and elaboration of the language of nationalism may have been one of the defining characteristics of the writings on travel that appeared in the interwar period, but this collection of texts was no less dominated by expressions of imperial rhetoric. As Fascist expansionism succeeded its liberal counterpart, the argument for pursuing a colonialist agenda with renewed vigour, took many forms, while criticism of the

global influence exercised by Britain and France filtered through the commentary of most observers. The denunciation that Appelius articulated in the course of his journey through India (1925) of what he saw as the partial and superficial nature of British rule was echoed by those who travelled to other parts of the globe. Those who visited different destinations in the Mediterranean, as I documented in Chapter One, articulated similar assertions on the instability of the British Empire, while writers like Raimondo Falci (1925) resented the tardiness of Italy in making any claim over Tunisia and who saw the French colonial system as something that was to be surpassed. The sanctions imposed by the League of Nations in the wake of the invasion of Ethiopia fuelled the sense of resentment felt by many towards the more extensive territorial possessions of their democratic rivals.¹¹ Even within the sub-genre of writing on the United States, there were those who argued that the country was itself an example of the expansion of Anglo-Saxon dominance.¹²

The reflections on imperialism that one can piece together from the writing on an array of countries do not, of course, only express bitterness towards the expansionism of nation states consolidated over a longer period of time, they also weave together the justification for an aggressive foreign policy. The profusion of photographs and verbal descriptions of settlers arriving in Libya or Eritrea were all intended to convey the impression that the new empire, when it had finally been hewn into shape, would provide enormous material advantage for Italy's urban and agrarian classes. Unlike the caricature of the British Empire, seen as delivering huge benefit only for a small elite, the expansion of the Italian nation would sustain the needs of its ever-growing population. The vision included the suggestion that Italy would acquire, through colonization, its Promised Land or its equivalent of the United States. As it was advanced in the literature of travel in the 1920s and 1930s, the argument for an acquisitive foreign policy was intimately connected with the Fascist cult of the nation: expansion was presented as the necessary recovery of Italy's Roman heritage. In the same way that the narration of visits to sites of national significance tended to be structured as a spiritual encounter, so journeys to the outposts of empire were recounted as a movement towards the soul of Rome, long dormant, but at last re-awakened, while part of the function that Italy's expanding colonies served was as to mirror the development of national life under Fascism.¹³ While contending that his work was simply referential, a writer like Piccioli (1934b) could collapse travel in space with travel in time and in moving through Italy's territorial possessions of the present he could imply that he was moving through an ideal society of the past. But Piccioli was

merely one of the most successful practitioners of a clearly identifiable genre and his work merely explored in greater imaginative detail than many others the dominant trope through which expansion was figured in the 1930s.

The belief in the recovery of the Roman past may have been inspiring for those at the forefront of the colonial adventure but it also served to differentiate Italian imperialism – at least in the view of its proponents – from that of other Western European countries. Many of the most prolific commentators were prepared to claim that the aim of the nation's expansion was not simply to procure material advantage but to pursue a spiritual mission and to penetrate the deepest workings of the societies over which Italy aspired to rule. Many writers expressed the view that Italian rule of Libya and the Dodecanese proved Italy's capacity to govern, while others wrote of an historic connection between Italy and the countries of the Mediterranean basin that stretched back over centuries, and speculated on the advantages that would flow from the revival of that connection.¹⁴ The contention was that the authority of historical precedent was evident not only to contemporary Italians but also to the subject populations of Italy's actual and future expansion. In her journey through Algeria (1929), Nella Orano had implied that there was a definite limit on the extent to which a European social model could be imposed on a population attached to its cultural and religious traditions. But as she documented resistance to the assimilation of the behaviour and practices of a modern colonial power, she asserted that the Roman ideal found a far stronger echo in the indigenous culture than the imposition of French rule. If one goes forward in time to examine the hastily prepared publications that preceded and accompanied Italy's invasion of Greece in October 1940 – in the work of the poet and novelist Icilio Bianchi for *Le Vie d'Italia* (1940) or in the writing of Sergio Gràtico (1941) – then one finds that the attempted annexation was conceptualized as a noble fusing of two ancient cultures: an event that in the past had given rise to nothing less than the birth of Rome.¹⁵

As well as presenting Rome as legitimating a modern brand of expansionism, most travel texts adopted the language of religious conversion in some form or another. Nella Orano, in the preface to her work (1929), described herself as a 'missionary' of the idea of Rome, while in the writing on the acquisition of Ethiopia, the spread of Italian civilization over wide tracts of East Africa was closely, and sometimes explicitly, as I have discussed in Chapter Four, associated with the earlier endeavours of Christian missionaries. The conflation of the fulfilment of national ambition with a kind of religious conversion may have been common to other European nation states but what distinguished the many

apologias for Italian expansion was their claim that the Fascist cult of the nation represented a political philosophy that was potentially of vast appeal to the subject populations of other European empires. If one turns again to the eloquence of Appelius (1925), then it is clear that his conception of Mussolini as a Messianic ruler was not meant to be of relevance only to Italians but to whole swathes of people across the globe. The very notion of Fascism as a modern form of religion allowed writers like Appelius or Piccioli to justify an imperial foreign policy both to the wider world and to the intended subjects of Italian domination. The contention that Italy was more favourable to the development of Arab nationalism than either Britain or France was strong in the writings of figures like Falci (1925) or Ciarlantini (1935) and it was integral to the message that Mussolini's visit to Libya in 1937, with all its elaborate symbolism, sought to convey. Indeed, as I suggested in Chapter One, there is a kind of transculturation (Pratt 1992) within certain formulations of the idea of Rome as well as in the representation of Italian dominance.

Running through the description of travel to parts of the growing Italian empire and elsewhere, there is, then, a fairly strong discourse that seeks to justify colonization by claiming that it was akin to conversion. Yet, a disparity quickly becomes apparent between the language of inclusion, however that was cast, and the actual consequences of expansionism. Undermining any claim to the formation of a new kind of empire that sought to bring real benefits to its intended subjects was the degree to which the writing reflected the violence of the imperial project. In the work of most journalists the equation that was made by the regime between militarism and national interest was echoed loudly and uncritically. The figure of the soldier or the Blackshirt was presented as the idealized expression of masculinity, the progress of the nation was conceived as a series of military victories, while the suppression of the perceived enemy was glorified. Thus Poggiali, even in the diary (1971: 78) that he kept during the period that he spent in Africa as a correspondent for the *Corriere*, could reflect laconically that violence was a necessary part of the colonialism. At the same time that Piccioli could write so effusively on the possibilities of collaboration between settlers and subject population in Libya in *La porta magica del Sahara* (1934b), he charted, without any sense of contradiction, the genocidal violence that was used to subdue resistance to the so-called re-conquest of Libya.¹⁶

The sense of racial hierarchy that pervaded the majority of texts on travel further undermined any suggestion of the convergence of the interests of settler and subject populations. While events like Mussolini's journey to Libya in 1937 sought to convey the impression of a merging

of Italian and Islamic principles and while some commentators may have enthusiastically predicted the dissemination of a common philosophy of nationhood, the texts reveal a deep-laid unease with any manifestation of hybridity. It did not occur to those who surveyed the newly acquired towns of the Ethiopian interior to contest the racial segregation that was planned for their future development. The distinction between colonizers and colonized, between those who dominated and those who were dominated, which the regime sought to police with increasing vigour in the late 1930s, was not challenged by any of the official visitors to Italy's African possessions. One of the most striking features of the writing on travel in the 1920s and 1930s is the way in which it represented so few encounters between the writer and the inhabitants of the country that was toured. While instances of some kind of inter-subjective encounter were rare, it was not uncommon for the writer to claim that the workings of the indigenous society of Libya or East Africa were entirely knowable and to project a stereotypical identity – to use the language of Homi Bhabha (1994) – onto the non-European other. A segregationist mentality was further evidenced by the fear of miscegenation that many observers articulated not only when seeking to evoke an image of Italy's fabled territories beyond the seas but also in the course of journeys through Asia and Central America.¹⁷

It is, of course, possible to see the rhetoric of inclusion as merely a propagandistic cover deployed cynically to mask the intention to undermine British or French influence and to pursue a policy of aggression and appropriation. But I think it is perhaps more accurate to see the travel texts of the period as articulating an irrational and mutually contradictory complex of ideas where the language of conversion, guidance and affinity was able to sit with the reflection of some of the very worst kinds of oppression. The inconsistency of the discourse that emerges from the texts as a whole is compounded by the diversity of writers' understanding of certain concepts. The very idea of Rome meant different things to different writers. For Piccioli (1934b) the architectural remnants of the Roman Empire were a visible manifestation of the soul of the nation and a reflection of Italy's renewed desire to dominate the Mediterranean. The sense of a racial hierarchy imbedded in his evocation of ancient past was at odds with the interpretation of imperial Rome that was advanced by Giuseppe Piazza (1933), the Berlin correspondent for *La Stampa*. Piazza contrasted the Nazi myth of race with the Fascist myth of Rome, arguing that the identification between race and nation was anachronistic and contrary to the political and ethnographic nature of Europe while, by contrast, the name of Rome stood for 'a process of universalization' (1933: 3). If a discrepancy of opinion often appeared

between the work of different writers then it was also present within the work of a single author. Cecchi could document incidents of racial persecution in the United States (1939) and yet remain blind to gravity of the racial discrimination that was being pursued in Italy at the very moment that his views on the United States were being published. Appellius, in his work on India (1925), advocated Fascism as a political doctrine of universal application and yet he celebrated (1937), as much as any other journalist who followed the Ethiopian campaign, the violence of one nation state's appropriation of another.

All writing about travel is inevitably also writing about time: the representation of a journey through space is also the representation of a journey through time. In most writing a sensitivity to the temporal is manifested in the author's awareness of the material evidence of past societies surviving into the present and exercising an influence on the way in which people live their lives. It is manifested in the author's visits to sites of archaeological or national importance and in the imaginative recreation of the original meanings that were conveyed by such sites as well as their continuing symbolic significance in the present. The more intricate examples of the genre explore the past in an effort to trace the history of the attitudes and behaviour that they observe. Writers of the intellectual sophistication of Cecchi or Sarfatti speculated on religious artefacts as a means of moving between then and now but many non-professional writers also sought to communicate their apprehension of past societies and their experience of an altered sense of time. Though travel writing most easily tells the story of the past, at least part of its appeal lies in its propensity to make predictions of the future. At a time of intense ideological confrontation, many travel writers of the 1920s and 1930s deliberately set out to use travel as a means of gaining an insight into the dangers to Italian expansionist ambitions posed by the imperialism of other nations; into the effects on a society of more advanced levels of industrialization; into the consequences of certain life styles or ways of thinking for a sense of national or personal identity. Few texts shied away from offering dire warnings of the pitfalls that lay ahead if one society or another were to exercise too strong a form of cultural influence.

There is, of course, a strong historical irony in the majority of announcements on the future that were formulated by some of the prominent literary and journalistic voices of the interwar years. Few could have imagined that the movement whose ideology they embraced and whose duration they likened to that of the Roman Empire was destined to come to so rapid and so violent an end. Equally misplaced were the predictions that were made on the inevitability of the decline of

the democratic powers in the face of the ascendancy of Fascism, the end of the liberal economic system or even the assurance that Mussolini would spare Italy from too close an alliance with Hitlerism.¹⁸ The utopianism that so inflected writing on time and geography under Fascism did not foretell the reality of the future. But, as part of this study has endeavoured to show, the allegiance of many commentators to the regime was complex and their analysis of the international situation in which they lived was by no means always partial or subservient. Some of the more astute observers were correctly able to identify events or phenomena that were likely to arise from the reality that they saw. Corrado Alvaro (1935) predicted the imperialism of Soviet Communism, while some of the many travellers to the United States were able to deduce the probable encroachments of the American version of modernity. In some respects, the prediction of the collapse of the colonial world as it was constituted in the 1920s and 1930s that one finds in a writer as committed to the formation of a new kind of imperialism as Mario Appellius was not entirely mistaken. Though correspondents in Spain during the Civil War or travellers to Nazi Germany admired the manifestations of military might that they witnessed or wrote of a 'war of religions', few were able to see with the clarity of Rodolfo Bottacchiari (1935: 325–26) that the confrontation with Soviet Communism would lead to a war of unimaginable destruction.

Notes

1. Japan in the 1930s attracted the attention, among others, of Mario Appellius (1942), Cesco Tomaselli (1935) and Ugo Caimpenta (1935). One text that did not follow the conventional pattern of foreign correspondence was Giuliana Stramigioli's narration of a year spent in Japan. Her book appeared in 1940.
2. For a good, though early example of this kind of writing on South America, see Luigi Incisa (1926).
3. For the writing of Lilli and Sorrentino on the Spanish Civil War, see Chapter Five. On Lilli's experiences during the Second World War, concealing himself in Rome after the German occupation of the city, and on his career as a journalist after the war, see Laura Lilli's preface to the 1988 reprint of his *Racconti di una guerra*.
4. On the subject of ministerial attempts to control the representation of the Second World War, see Tranfaglia (2005).
5. Among the most significant accounts of the progress of the war and the collapse of Fascism were Curzio Malaparte's fictionalized version of Italian involvement on different fronts, *Kaputt* (1944), and Cristiano Ridomi's narration of Italian surrender, witnessed from the Italian embassy in Berlin (1972).

6. It is perhaps not coincidental that some of the more prolific travellers – Ciarlantini (1933) and Sarfatti (1926) – all wrote fulsome biographies of Mussolini. Luisa Passerini (1991) has revealed the extraordinary variety that existed in the image of the Duce as it was presented through the consciousness of his many biographers.
7. During the Second World War Appelius gained a certain notoriety as a highly partial radio commentator. He was arrested in Rome at the end of 1944 and tried for collaboration with the now fallen regime. Benefiting from an amnesty of June 1946, he was freed from prison. He died in December of that year. For an account of the final years of his life, see Sposito 2002: 299–327. As is well known, Alessandro Pavolini was Minister of Popular Culture until 1943. During the Republic of Salò he served as the head of the Republican Fascist Party. He was captured and executed by partisans in April 1945. On the final period of his life, see Petacco 1998: 189–206.
8. On Sarfatti's decision to leave Italy first for France in November 1938 and subsequently for Uruguay at the start of the war, see Cannistraro and Sullivan (1993: 520–30).
9. Alvaro continued to work as a writer and journalist after the war until his death in 1956.
10. On this event and the Italian writers who attended, see Ben-Ghiat (2001: 179–80) and Serri (2002).
11. A good example of this kind of writing is provided by Virginio Gayda's analysis of Anglo-Italian relations in the wake of the invasion of Ethiopia (1936).
12. This was certainly the view of Franco Ciarlantini (1934), see Chapter Seven.
13. Aldo Valori, writing in the *Corriere della Sera* (1937: 1), had described Libya as a 'distant but extremely significant projection of national life'.
14. On this view, expressed in particular by Falci (1925) and by Ciarlantini (1935), see Chapter One.
15. Decided upon directly by Mussolini, the invasion began disastrously with Greek resistance forcing Italian troops back into Albania. The invasion was only concluded successfully in 1941 with the aid of German forces (Rochat 1997: 350–51). The occupation of much of Greece was to last until the Italian surrender to the Allied forces in 1943.
16. Piccioli's description of the violence involved in the re-conquest of Libya is to be found in *La nuova Italia d'oltremare* (1934a: 188–205).
17. See Chapter Two for journeys through Asia and Central America. As documented in Chapter Four, the expression of the fear of miscegenation was accompanied by the rigidly observed censorship on the reality of contact between Italians and Africans in Eritrea and Ethiopia.
18. In his study of the Soviet Union, Ciocca (1933: 269, 273–74) had predicted that the liberal economic system was destined to come to an end and that humanity would be left to choose between the versions of political idealism offered alternatively by Mussolini and by Gandhi. He also proclaimed that his generation was the most fortunate to live through the history of time (274). Among those who saw Mussolini as likely to spare Italy from too close a relationship with Nazi Germany was Francesco Saverio Giovanucci (1933), see Chapter Six.

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